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FINDING A RELIGION TO LIVE BY

CHARLES EMERSON BURTON

Secretary of the National Council of Congregational Churches in the United States

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PREFACE

The following chapters are intended for earnest-minded people who desire a religion that works in daily life. Four types of mind are thought of: (1) Christian people who are convinced of the validity of their faith but find it difficult to arrive at satisfactory statements of that faith. (2) Christians who are beginning to question the validity of their faith but are earnestly seeking the truth. (3) Those who have felt impelled to surrender their faith but are still seeking light. (4) Those who for the first time are professing the Christian faith or are contemplating such profession.

The infant has a working basis for life. He has an appetite and takes what is offered him. The average man has a similar working basis for living. He goes to the table and eats without knowing much about the food except that it tastes good and satisfies his appetite. As he goes on eating he finds that some things agree with him and others do not. He therefore begins the study of his diet, but all the while he eats. This is what is meant by a religion "to live by." We have an appetite for religion. Ready prepared religion is offered us by the home, the church and society in general. The average religious man takes that religion as he takes his food, and he is wise to do so. His wisdom, however, will lead him to the study of his religious diet, while he goes on practicing his religion.

That we should think our way through to a perfectly satisfactory system of religious thought is altogether too much to expect. We cannot do that regarding our physical life. The occasional genius may arrive by thought processes at positions satisfactory to himself, but they are fairly sure to be at variance with the conclusions of other rare minds; that is, religion is not an exact science. Nevertheless, every rational being must think, and the more he thinks the better. This book is intended to stimulate practical thinking. It does not attempt to exhaust any subject treated.

In considering a religion for our day—a day of fearless thinking

—three principles are important: (1) Religious concepts should be squared absolutely with all well-attested knowledge. (2) Every religious tenet not absolutely essential to religious living should be held in suspense, if it becomes a stumbling-block because contrary to fairly well-established truth. (3) Religious concepts that are fundamental to life should be brought out into the open, clearly stated, adjusted to all known truth, positively affirmed and put into practice in daily life. These are the principles followed in this little book.

Another book should be written to deal with the life that naturally results from vital religion. That subject appears in these pages only incidentally. Our concern here is primarily with the faith that underlies and motivates noble living.

Questions and Scripture references for further study will be found on pages 99-101.

CHARLES EMERSON BURTON

New York, Sept. 1, 1928

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I

ENROLLING IN THE SCHOOL OF JESUS

Most people find their religion just as they find their family relations. It is there in their homes, and they take it just as they take their parents, without first searching for them. There are others who do not thus come upon religion but who go in search of it. It is not found in their homes, nor in their ordinary associations. For such the finding of religion means a complete right-about. Sometimes this is called "conversion." But whether it be found in one way or in another, religion is found when one entertains religious convictions which shape character and determine the course of life.

Finding Religion Where the Disciples Found It.—When the first Christians accepted Jesus' invitation to follow him, they constituted a school of religion, with Jesus as teacher. It was something more than an ordinary school; it was an apprenticeship in living. Their whole lives were changed by it. They gave that religion to the world and the course of history was altered. This experience points the way for us all. When we become acquainted with Jesus Christ and consent to his invitation to learn of him, we, too, find a religion to live by.

Here at the outset, then, we have come upon the very essence of the Christian religion. *To be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus Christ,* a pupil in his school, an apprentice in his way of living. This is within reach of every earnest soul.

Suppose it were necessary in order to be a Christian fully to understand God and man and all the mysteries of life. Suppose it required assent to the one true *creed*. Suppose it demanded the observance of just the right *ceremony*, or suppose even that it required attainment in *character* of a specified grade. Who then could be a Christian? Where do we find agreement on Christian doctrines? What creed is *the* creed? What ceremony is *the* ceremony? And who can be found of virtue worthy to claim divine approval? No, there are high values in doctrines and creeds and ceremonies and in character, but the difference between one who has the Christian religion and one who has not is that one recognizes Jesus Christ as his religious leader while the other does not.

Now the following of leaders is the genius of all society. Beginning in the home the child follows the parent, then the teacher, then the hero, then one leader or another, one group or another. For us, therefore, for whom it is doubtless Christianity or no religion, the practical question is, Do we acknowledge Jesus Christ as our spiritual leader? We may have come to such acknowledgment by normal processes, just as a child acknowledges obligations to parents, or we may have found our way by searching to faith in Jesus Christ. But if we acknowledge his leadership we are Christians and have a religion to live by.

If we have not decided that question but really want a religion, one that will serve us in our workaday life, just what shall we seek? Not primarily knowledge, not mystical experience, not ceremonial initiation, not even right living, but first of all a *leader*. Only the rarest genius can find religion in any other way. It is improbable that these words will reach any who would be likely to turn

to any other leader than Jesus Christ. It is either Christianity or no religion; therefore the practical question is, Do I acknowledge Jesus as a trustworthy religious guide whom I purpose to follow? If I do, I am a Christian.

They Had a Religion to Live by From the Start.—The moment the disciples assented to Jesus' invitation to follow him, this following of him became their religion and they began to live by it. Henceforward they lived where he lived and as he lived. Jesus did not require them to sign a creed, neither did he initiate them by baptism or other sacraments. These came at the end, not at the beginning. He did not ask Peter how good he was, nor whether he could refrain from swearing and lying; probably Saul of Tarsus, before his conversion, would have made a better disciple on that basis. What he asked of them was that they should become *pupils* and learn of him. Having become pupils in his school and *apprentices* in his way of living, they were his followers; they were Christians.

Exactly the same thing is true of us. The moment we enroll in the school of Jesus by deciding to determine our lives by his teaching we become Christians. *From that moment* we have a religion to live by. We cannot leave our daily rounds and go with him in the same sense that the disciples did, but we may go with him immediately by traveling the well-known ways of his teaching. Of course our knowledge of his teaching is very incomplete. One cannot read the four Gospels even casually without feeling that words attributed to Jesus must be simply the recollection of what he said, and that after years had passed. This is especially true of the fourth Gospel, that classic of Christian literature. It would strain one's credulity to believe that the language of the long address in the fif-

teenth, sixteenth and seventeenth chapters of John is word for word as Jesus spoke it. No real student of that Gospel would contend that any of its sayings attributed to Jesus are surely his exact words. But when we seek principles to live by, we find them in the four Gospels. They are attributed to Jesus; they are born of companionship with Jesus; they constitute our picture of Jesus. It is this Jesus that we choose to follow. If we find in this picture of Jesus some things which do not help our lives, we may suspend judgment regarding them; but there still remain plain paths in which to walk. These are our real concern.

Here are a few of the paths he invites us to travel: (1) recognition of the supreme claims of God; (2) the love of neighbor as oneself; (3) responsiveness to the noblest spiritual impulses; (4) the practice of sincere prayer; (5) the study of the Scriptures; (6) faithfulness in public worship; (7) the forsaking of evil ways; (8) strenuous pursuit of what we know to be good; (9) testimony concerning him to our neighbors and to the ends of the earth. These things, not to mention many others, are recognized by every one who reads these words as things to which Jesus Christ definitely invites us. When we recognize him as our guide and teacher, we have in these things a religion by which we may begin to live in that very hour.

They Found More and More Religion From Day to Day.—Having come upon Jesus, as it were, by accident and finding thus in him a religion to live by, the disciples set out on the definite pursuit of the enlargement of their religion. Where he went they went; what he said they heard; what he did was to them a lesson. His life was for them an example. While they learned his teachings they absorbed his spirit, and in the things he gave them to do they found practice in a growing religion.

Nevertheless (and here is solace for us), at the end of his ministry their understanding of him and of his religion was very imperfect, and their conduct was occasion for reproach; but in spite of all, they were followers of Jesus Christ; they were Christians.

We are to follow a similar process. While we do not have the presence of Jesus in human form, we may go directly to his teachings in the New Testament. There also, we may witness his deeds as he went about doing good. There he stands out as an example of the principles which he preached. His very spirit breathes there in the record of his life, teachings, and death. Then, too, we may absorb the spirit of the Christ as it breathes in Christ-like souls. Again, in the church of Christ contacts with him are vitalized. So it is possible for us to follow him and increase our knowledge of him from day to day as did the disciples.

There is comfort for us in the fact that we are not different from the first followers of Jesus in that we are mistaken over many things (that is, most of us must be mistaken because so few of us agree with the rest of us). There is comfort also, when we stumble and fall, in the fact that here, too, we are not different from the stumbling and falling disciples. As was the case with them, so with us; whatever our mistakes and failings, if with sincerity we are pupils of Jesus Christ then we are Christians.

They Continued to Find Religion After His Death.—If you read the Epistles written by these disciples sometime after the death of Jesus, you will find a quite different understanding of Christianity from that which they had at the time of his death. They had proved true in life what he said would be true; namely, that the Spirit of

Truth would come and live with them and would teach them concerning himself. This is of high importance for us, for it means nothing less than that every truth into whose possession we come is an addition to our religion; it means that God is revealing himself to us in every new discovery; in short, there is nothing that is known to be true which may not clarify and illumine our religion.

This being true we need be in no wise disturbed if we discover that the great doctrines and creeds of the Christian church are not perfect. We are to rejoice rather than to be disturbed when we find that to this very hour we must modify our conceptions of religion. That is in accord with the teaching of our guide. He told us that the Spirit of Truth would abide in us and lead us in the truth.

Practicing Our Religion as We Find It.—Our religion, therefore, develops naturally just as do all forms of life. No one of us is or should be satisfied with his religion. He is ever seeking to know more about the great things of man and God; but while he is seeking to know more he is practicing what he does know, and as he practices he comes to know more.

Wrestling with the Doctrines of Christianity.—Men are thinking beings. It was inevitable that thought on religion should take form. Consequently we have a great body of Christian doctrines incorporated in creeds, confessions, statements, principles, etc. Whenever we formulate our thought concerning a great spiritual fact, that statement should constitute a force in our life; if it ceases to be helpful to life, and particularly if it becomes a hindrance, then that statement should be revised or dispensed with. For example, Jesus made it plain to his disciples that he was dying upon the Cross for the salvation of men. It was

inevitable that the minds of Christ's followers should seek to make an explanation of that event. For generations men have been moved to conviction of sin, repentance and reformation, because they held that their Saviour had died in their place and God's anger had been turned away in consequence. This was a mighty force. Now, wholly apart from the question as to whether errors crept into the thinking of Christian people, it is a simple fact that the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement does not appeal to the consciences of most men today as it appears to have done in other days. Moreover that doctrine is vigorously repudiated by many minds as immoral. Clearly then, if we are to have a doctrine regarding the death of Christ which shall contribute to Christian living, we must so recast our conceptions of the fact and its meaning as to give it power over our lives. In a later chapter (VIII) we make an attempt to restate the meaning of Calvary. The test of that chapter or of any conception of the Cross of Christ is, Does my holding of it make me a better Christian? If it does not, then the statement of that doctrine should be ignored, and the soul should set out on a search for a statement of that great spiritual fact which will contribute to the attainment of the ideals of Jesus. Similar things should be said concerning every doctrine of the church.

Take the doctrine of *Creation*. A severely literalistic interpretation of the hymn of creation in Genesis pictures God as molding a lump of clay and by creative breath transforming it into the wonderfully intricate human body with all its associated powers of mind and heart, and all this within the space of twenty-four hours. To the millions of earnest people who cannot accept this interpretation, one of two courses is open: (1) abandon religion or

(2) find a vital doctrine of man which is tenable and which contributes to high living. To multitudes man is the product of the age-long life of God in the universe—the child of God who lives in God's life, yet with a degree of self-determination adequate even to the assertion of enmity against God. (See Chapter IV.) Jesus gave no decision as between such doctrines. "One is your Father, even God," was his faith to live by. It is for us, therefore, so to conceive of man as to furnish inspiration to lives worthy of sons of God.

Then there is the doctrine of the *infallible church*. If a Christian can accept this doctrine, then a religion to live by becomes simple. The church tells him what he may and may not do. It remains for him only to obey. If that doctrine goes counter to one's reason it becomes a hindrance to life rather than a help. One of two courses is open to him: he may refuse to be a follower of Jesus Christ or he may find a doctrine which is tenable. That is what we mean by finding a religion to live by.

Others say *the Bible*, not the church, is the infallible source of faith and practice. Here also the claim to infallibility may mean for the hasty a complete rejection of the Bible. In other words, this doctrine becomes a thing to die by rather than to live by. The other course is to search and find a better doctrine about the Scriptures, on the basis of which one may live. (See Chapter VI.)

The doctrine that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the *Virgin Mary* is an ancient doctrine of the Church. If this doctrine be true, then Jesus was indeed from above and he speaks with authority and one may live by his words. But suppose you find it impossible to affirm this doctrine, shall you therefore throw over all

the teachings of Jesus and refuse to follow him, even though he himself said nothing about this doctrine; or will you say that you know other reasons for placing confidence in him which are wholly tenable, and thus find a religion to live by? The value of the Virgin birth is in its support of the authority of Jesus. If for you that authority rests more securely on other grounds, then you may safely suspend judgment regarding the doctrine of the Virgin birth and live by the authority of Jesus' life and words.

Similar things may be said concerning other doctrines which do not prove helpful to the average man of our generation. Suspend judgment on these and lay firm hold on things unquestionably believed.

Using vs. Misusing Creeds.—There are those who subscribe to no "creed" who are true followers of Jesus; let none deny their Christian life. There are others who need creeds; let none deny these their help. For them the creed performs a high function. The term comes from the Latin word *credo,* "I believe." When a man stands up and says "I believe," he has committed himself. For one to commit himself means to influence his life mightily. It is of high importance, therefore, that we should find vital things concerning which we can say with deep conviction, "I believe." Moreover, there is high value if we can agree with our brethren and so in common say "We believe," even though it must be with some reservation on details.

Sometimes, however, the creed has been made the occasion for keeping people out of the company of Christians because, forsooth, they found things in creeds, written perhaps hundreds of years before, to which they could not conscientiously assent. Thus to use the creed is grossly to misuse it. The creed is to be used when it will help; to be ignored when it will hinder.

Climbing Upward on Ceremonies.—The function of the ceremony in the Christian church is to teach, to testify, and to express aspiration in Christian worship. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper, for example, is a powerful testimony regarding our desire to have the life of God in ourselves. Its teaching concerning the gifts of Christ and the fellowship of believers, as also of many other things, is clear beyond the power of spoken language. In it the hearts of men go out toward God in sincere worship. Similar things are true of all the fine ceremonies of the church. Let no man think he is made a Christian by observing a ceremony, but let no Christian deny himself the help of ceremonies.

Growing Strong Through Living Experiences.—Much has been made at times of "experience" as an evidence of Christian life. By this has frequently been meant certain emotional conditions, taken to be the evidence of God's pleasure and, therefore, of the genuineness of our faith. Let us acknowledge promptly that many of such "experiences" are quite unreal and artificial, however sincere the subject. Having said this much let us assure ourselves that when the great ideas associated with religion take possession of a man, they are bound to produce effects. Emotion and feeling cannot but assert themselves when God becomes real to our minds, when the love of God is actually sensed, when our own need is definitely seen, when the meaning of sin is clearly discerned, or when any great religious conception takes possession of us. One who sees the enormity of sin cannot help being impelled to turn away from it with deep feeling. Seeing the riches of God's heart as revealed by Christ is sure to arouse a responding love. A conception of the greatness and glory

of God, although necessarily inadequate, cannot but mean an expansion of spirit with consequent impulses to high living. Every one may have such a religion to live by.

Attaining Unto Christian Character.—Clearly no one can be a sincere follower of Jesus Christ without the effort to be like him. Notice, however, that attaining the best of character is not what makes us his followers; rather the following of Christ gives us our character.

Probably the most frequent answer given to those who invite men to unite with the church is "I am not good enough." Who is good enough? If that were made the standard of church membership there would be no church. No, the church is a brotherhood of students; of those who follow after, not of those who have attained. We cannot judge whether a man is a Christian by the character he has already attained. It is a question of the road he is traveling. The man of high character may be traveling away from Christ and ultimately downward. The man of poor attainment in character may be traveling toward Christ and with Christ to high attainment. The latter is a Christian.

If Jesus Christ is a man,—
And only a man,—I say
That of all mankind I cleave to him,
And to him will I cleave alway.

If Jesus Christ is a god,—
And the only God,—I swear
I will follow him through heaven and hell,
The earth, the sea, and the air!

—RICHARD WATSON GILDER[1]

[1] From "The Poems of Richard Watson Gilder." Copyright by Houghton Mifflin Company. Used by permission.

II

GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH GOD

Does God speak to you? He did speak to Jesus. Do you have friendly relations with God? Jesus did. Having decided to seek a religion to live by through following Jesus, we bring to him the greatest of all questions. What about God?

Jesus Introducing God and Man.—Jesus introduces God to men as one would introduce friend to friend. Suppose you are blind. Arm in arm with a friend you go into a room. So far as you know it is empty. As a matter of fact there are other persons in the room. Possibly you detect a stir and wonder whether such is not the case. You may discern an inarticulate murmur of voices which you recognize as human, but there is no acquaintanceship, no friendship here for you. Your friend, however, speaks up, saying, "Here is Mr. So and So. I would like you to meet my friend." He takes your hand and puts it in his. Accompanying the hand-clasp words are spoken. An acquaintance is begun which speedily develops into friendship. This is the kind of thing which Jesus does as between his followers and his Father.

We are in a world, the central facts concerning which are not obvious to us. We are aware of a stirring; possibly almost articulate voices come to our inner ears. Then we become acquainted with Jesus Christ. Figuratively speaking, he takes us by the hand. He says, "I want you to know my Father—your Father," and he continues:

"Here are flowers, wonderfully clothed. It is my Father living in your presence. Behold the birds of the air; not one of them rises or falls without him. How much more is he present in your life; so much so that every hair of your head is numbered. In the secret chambers of your heart most of all, he is living and you may speak to him. When you pray say, 'Our Father.' I live, love, serve and die for men. It is God in action before your eyes, for 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.'" In short, Jesus introduces us to God, living *in his world,* speaking *in our hearts,* and revealed *in himself.*

First-Hand Awareness of God.—This is a process of acquaintance with God which is open to the ordinary mind. "Father, I thank thee that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and the prudent and hast revealed them unto babes." Of course Jesus does not mean that he wishes the wise man to be ignorant of God, but he does mean that wisdom is not the necessary qualification in order that a child of God may become acquainted with his heavenly Father. We have a true parallel in this world. A child may know his father before he is able to explain the biology of his body or the psychology of his mind. He has first-hand awareness of his father's person before he reaches any puzzling question concerning personality. He is conscious of his mother's consciousness of him before any one raises with him the question as to whether consciousness is real or a fiction. So in the great world with its tremendous physical structure, dominated by order, beauty and intelligence, and producing in its creatures thought, reason, consciousness, volition and love, one may have an immediate awareness of the all-embracing personality which is the Father of his own spirit. Here is the physical world,

moving, acting, doing things, just as the physical man is doing things. We infer the person of the man from the expressions of the body. We should likewise discern the spirit in the universe from its physical activities, including man as part and parcel thereof. These disclose intelligence, feeling, will, personality. The universe is God's body, in which he expresses himself, just as your body is the instrument of your personality. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Yes, for he lives before their eyes.

God Is Spiritual.—Jesus assumed the usual conceptions of God. He is the source of all being; the ruler of the universe; rewarder of the faithful. He is holy, just, all-powerful. He assumed also the conception of God as a conscious personal being. But he brings new emphasis to the thought of God as a spirit, intercourse with whom must be in spirit and in truth.

Although we may think of God as sitting above the circle of the earth, Jesus introduces us to one who is in the same room with ourselves, as near to us in America as he was to Jesus in Palestine. Yes, with us and in us. The wonders of his life have produced distinct personalities in us, capable of interpreting him and conversing with him. This activity of spirit in us is his own voice speaking to us. We find ourselves thinking; this means that God thinks. We are attracted by the beautiful; God loves beauty. We approve of the true over the false; God is righteous. We are impelled to acts of kindness and mercy; God is expressing himself in us. At the same time these choices and actions are our own. If we choose to act agreeably with his thought we are in intercourse with him. If we choose to resist his desires we have no friendship with him.

God Is Our Father.—Perhaps the chief emphasis in the

teaching of Jesus concerning God is upon the name, "Father,"—my Father, your Father, our Father. The story of the prodigal son is central in his thought of God. Our heavenly Father knows about us; cares for us; loves us. This we are to observe in the way he acts toward us and in us. But most essential of all we are to see it in the fact that Jesus himself is a living representation of the character of God. "He that seeth me seeth him that sent me." The God to whom Jesus introduces us is as good as was Jesus when he healed the sick, blessed the little children, delivered the Sermon on the Mount, spake forgiveness to sinners, loved his disciples in the upper room, died on Calvary. Yes, Jesus asks us to become acquainted with God and to find him as good as the mother love which he created—as good as Jesus, his well-beloved son.

We Have Direct Contacts with God.—If now everything that is going on in all the universe is the body of God doing things, as it is animated by God just as human bodies express the spirits that are in them, how are we to go about interpreting those activities?

We are to start right where we are. As we look around us what do we observe? Ordinarily our observation is rather superficial. We say that the weather is good or bad; that the crops are promising or unpromising. We observe the trend of human life in the news of the day. We read books. We interpret history. We are impressed by the characters of Christians or the hypocrisy of professors of Christianity. Most of all we observe our own feelings and emotions. Probably all this doesn't mean much to us religiously. It is confused, complex, baffling. Nevertheless, a thoughtful person can hardly escape the feeling that he is in the presence of something or of somebody that sustains, relates and orders it all.

Going on beyond these surface things we observe the *order* which prevails in the universe; the operations of the great laws of nature; *beauty* wide-spread and entrancing; *power* operating beyond our conception; *life* fascinatingly interesting in its wide variety; *consciousness* elusive in its nature; *moral character* rooted in the power of choice in man; hatred or *good-will* expressing itself toward men; the *unselfish spirit* leading to kindness and even to sacrifice. And Jesus bids us say "Our Father" as we see it in its totality. He asks us to take God for granted and so to live. "Act as though I were, and thou shalt know that I am." What better formula could we have for the introduction which Jesus gives us to God—for a faith to live by?

Checking up Faith with Knowledge.—Remembering now that Jesus himself said that the spirit of truth would abide with us and lead us to all truth, what has the accumulated knowledge of the world to say about our feeling of acquaintance with God?

There are two great schools of thought,—the materialistic and the spiritualistic. The former maintains that the material world is quite adequate to explain everything; the spiritualistic school holds that the recognition of spiritual reality is necessary to an adequate explanation of ourselves and of our world. To the materialist there is no need of anything that we call spiritual about a man. His mind, his consciousness, his memory, his will, his personality, can all be explained by the properties of his physical body and cannot exist except by the functioning of that body.

The spiritualist recognizes the large place of the physical in man and in the universe, but feels that the very functioning of the physical body cannot be understood apart from spiritual reality. This does not mean that there are

two worlds, one material and one spiritual, but rather that the whole material world is charged with spirit. It is not spirit and body, but a spiritual body; it is not the world and God, but a God-world. Consciousness in man is the product of spirit-charged matter. One's body does not possess his spirit nor his spirit his body, but his body is spiritual; and living, thinking, feeling, choosing, loving, are possible because physical things are not dead but alive. The divine personality is the spirit-filled universe functioning. God is in everything. Now this seems the more reasonable interpretation to many of the greatest scientific and philosophical thinkers. There are others who think that the materialistic interpretation is the more rational; probably, however, the great majority of great thinkers are with the spiritualistic interpretation. Note that this spiritual interpretation agrees with and illuminates the introduction which Jesus gives us to God.

Exercising Faith.—Suppose now we are unable to fathom these mysteries. What if we say these things are beyond us? Then, Jesus says, "You cannot escape living as though one or the other were true; make your own *choice.*" He then adds his advice, *"Have faith in God."* The practical point is that with the fullest exercise of our reason we are intellectually free to make our choice with Jesus Christ, and doing this, we give the name of God to that with which we become acquainted; namely, the spirit which animates this wonderful universe with all its might, majesty, beauty, order, intelligence, feeling and love. Now if Jesus is right we may live our daily lives in company with our spiritual Father, whose physical body makes him known just as we live with our friends whose spirits we never see and whose personalities we know only as we

interpret the functioning of their physical bodies. What that converse with God through his body is, we leave to another chapter. (See Chapter x.)

We are concerned at this point to emphasize the fact that we are just as reasonable when we interpret our communion with nature as communion with a personal father as we are when we interpret our intercourse with friends as real, although they can express themselves only through physical bodies. Are we not herein exercising our common sense and our deepest insight?

We Have a Right to Believe or Disbelieve.—Let us hurry to say that there is no mathematical *demonstration* of the existence of God. There are "evidences" that fill many volumes. There are *experiences* that it is hard to interpret on any other supposition. But if you really prefer to live as though there were no God you may do so. And how glad we ought to be of that fact. We are free! If the evidences of God were so overwhelming that we could not ignore him, what slaves we should be. How little of real independence there could be for a human mind in the flaming presence of a divine mind! God has graciously veiled the glare of that light and to such a degree that we may deny his very existence if that is our preference.

On the other hand it is impossible for anybody to *disprove* the reality of God, or to deny the validity of our experiences of him. If there be living human beings whose senses are all numbed to the point that they can neither see, hear, feel, nor sense any reality, this does not make the reality unreal. The fact that we cannot sense gravity but only interpret it from evidence does not mean that there is no force of gravity. The fact that our minds are not big enough to comprehend all the truth about the

Infinite does not mean that there is no truth in those immediate contacts which we have with the divine personality. No, we are perfectly free to interpret our experience on the spiritual basis; to follow Jesus when he says, "Have faith in God."

We Must Choose Belief or Unbelief.—Moreover, we *must choose* either to believe in him or to disbelieve in him. If I ask you to go to lunch with me, you either go or you do not go. If Jesus invites you to exercise faith in God, you either exercise it or you do not exercise it. Being free to choose, it becomes *a moral question:* Do I want to live as though there were a God, or do I prefer to live as though there were no God? Now, in the human world I am perfectly free to deny your existence and to act as though you were not; I am free to act as though there were no other human being. But if I choose this course I am put in an asylum.

Choosing a Sane or an Insane World.—How do you treat me if you are convinced that I am mentally deficient, unbalanced or insane? At best you tolerate me; you cannot take me seriously. You may talk to me as though I were rational to keep me quiet, but you do not mean what you say. How then do you relate yourself to the universe if you consider it irrational? You relate yourself to it just as you would to an insane man: you may get that man to do some physical work if you learn how to manage him, but you can know no real satisfaction from intercourse with him; he is "out of his head"; you are intelligent; there can be no substantial friendship. So also if you choose the materialistic theory, you are condemned to living in an insane universe. That universe embraces you and all men. You have no grounds for taking life seriously. You

put up with existence; you make the best of it, as you do of necessary association with mentally unbalanced persons. Now you are free to choose that interpretation if you want to. That is one kind of religion by which you may live. They who decide to follow Jesus Christ, however, choose a religion to live by which sees the spiritual Father of men at the heart of the universe in which man lives. It proves to be a good religion to live by.

> Thou canst not prove that thou art body alone,
> Nor canst thou prove that thou art spirit alone,
> Nor canst thou prove that thou art both in one.
> Nor yet that thou art mortal—nay, my son,
> Thou canst not prove thou art immortal, no,
> Thou canst not prove that I, who speak with thee,
> Am not thyself in converse with thyself,
> For nothing worthy proving can be proven,
> Nor yet disproven. Wherefore be thou wise,
> Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
> And cling to faith beyond the forms of Faith!
>
> —TENNYSON

III

SENSING SPIRITUAL REALITIES

Haunted houses are not taken seriously by thinking people today. Is not a man a fool if he believes in any immaterial presences? We bring another vital question to our Teacher. Is there any spiritual reality? Is there any place in up-to-date religion for anything mystical? Should we rather be wise to find a religion that confines itself to practical things—things that we can handle?

"Abide in me." "Lo, I am with you always." Such was the burden of the last words of Jesus to his disciples. But how can one abide in another? How can one who lived centuries ago be with me today? These queries raise the central question, What was the great reality concerning Jesus? It was not his physical existence in Palestine. It was the stupendous fact that the spirit that was in Jesus was and is everywhere present and always present. That spirit permeates the universe; it is as real and as fundamental as the force of gravity. Here are planets and suns, galaxies and a universe, all made possible by the dependable mystery which we try to explain popularly by the name of gravity. Here also are law and order, beauty and intelligence, consciousness and affection—all spiritual realities and all accounted for on the theory that the universe is charged with spirit.

The Spiritual Is as Real as the Physical.—Now, this is an age which likes to deal with realities. But think! A contractor is putting up a great building with stones, steel,

lumber; he is handling real things. Suppose, however, he ignores the law of gravity, because he cannot touch it with his fingers nor see it with his eyes. He will soon come to grief. Gravity is as real for the builder as are the stone and steel. So the spirit is as real for the man as his body. The atoms of which the stone is built are as real as the stone, although they cannot be seen. The protons and electrons of which the atoms are built are as real as the steel, although they are wholly elusive to sight. Honesty in a bank cashier is as real as the fingers which handle the gold; but whoever saw or touched honesty?

Some philosophers tell us that minds and all spiritual things are very unreal. They are just the results of the motions of some sort of "neutral stuff" made up of "events," whatever that may mean. Observe that they say the same thing about body; that, too, is made up simply of the result of "events." But being a practical man one may say, if the philosopher will grant me that my spiritual experiences are as real as my bodily experiences, then I am content. That is real enough for me. A great conviction of the reality of the spirit means everything; without it life is scarcely worth living; with it life is glorious. This is vital to a religion by which one may live.

The earth is a place of life because it is bathed with mighty influences from without. There are the heat of the sun, the light, the unknown numbers of other radiations from this great material universe of which the earth is a part. Only by the meeting upon our globe of these influences is life here made possible.

The Spirit of Jesus is Native to the Universe, as is Every Spiritual Quality.—Likewise the intelligence, feeling, affection, will power, all the qualities which go to make

up a personality, are made possible because such things are in the universe and the influences of that universe beat upon us. Among these qualities made manifest in life is the Christlike quality revealed in many men in all ages, but especially made to glow and come to consciousness in Jesus Christ. That reality is as truly a reality as the sunshine. Wherever there is a person, there is a pressure of the Christ atmosphere. If this spirit were not in the universe, there never would have been a Jesus Christ. He was and is as much a product of spiritual forces in the universe as flowers are brought to being by sunshine. That spirit presses upon us like an atmosphere. If we "abide in it" we live Christlike lives.

We Are to Breathe This Spiritual Air.—Does all this seem unreal? It is no more so than the secret of the atmosphere in the lungs. All nature says to physical bodies, Abide in the atmosphere and you shall live. All living beings on the earth inhale the atmosphere however unconscious they may be of that atmosphere. As intelligent beings we are able to understand it in some part and to see to it that we abide in it properly. We warm the air of our homes in winter; perhaps we cool it in summer. We insist that there shall be ventilation. We take breathing exercises. We even pump air into lungs. In other words we can do something about abiding in the atmosphere.

In the same way while there is such a thing as breathing the spirit of Christ unconsciously, it is quite possible to control, in a measure, our relationship to the spirit of Christ which fills our world like air. We may welcome it or repel it; Jesus makes it practical when he says, "Ye are clean because of the word which I have spoken unto you." "If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love."

That is, just to think about the teachings of Jesus Christ, just to do the things which he teaches, is to breathe the atmosphere of his spirit. It is to abide in him.

Vitalizing the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.—This leads us to a difficult article of our faith. When we say, "I believe in God, I believe in Jesus Christ," there seems to be reality in the assertion; but many of us shrink when we come to say, "I believe in the Holy Ghost." It means little or nothing to us; it may be a stumbling block. As a matter of fact, it should furnish much to live by.

What was it that made Jesus powerful? "The spirit of the Lord is upon me." It was that consciousness which made him mighty. J. Middleton Murray, in his book, "Jesus, the Man of Genius," speaks of the spirit which was upon Jesus as follows: "The spirit was that plenary addition to himself that came from his experience of God . . . . it was simply that part or power of God which abides with Jesus or any man after his union with God. It was not God, for God was other than himself. It was not himself for he was other than he had been. It was the God who henceforth was in himself." In referring to this spirit Jesus uses two terms that make it seem real to us. He calls the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of Truth," and again, "the Comforter," or "Helper."

The Holy Spirit Is the Spirit of Truth.—We know what it means to be honest. We know the difference between the man who sees things straight and the man who is always twisting things. Now the spirit that wants to know, the spirit that is sincere, the spirit that understands, the spirit that is fair, and the spirit that has the honesty of good will as well, that is the Holy Spirit.

What a flood of light this throws on life! How many

modest men and women there are in the world who have this spirit and do not know that they are inhabited by the Holy Spirit. It is this spirit which "convicts the world in respect of sin, righteousness and judgment." He who has such a spirit recognizes sin for what it is. He understands the meaning of righteousness. To him the consequence of rightdoing or wrongdoing is obvious. Moreover it is this spirit which leads to knowledge; it delves into all truth.

Now where do we think the spirit of truth comes from? Is it suspended in a kind of vacuum? Does it grow without soil or sunshine, without air or light? Does it just happen, or is it as real a product of a real world as are potatoes, corn, flowers and men? The answer is obvious: here is something that is alive. It lives because there is something to grow out of and an atmosphere to live in. This spirit is in man because it is in the world; because it is a part of the universe. It is essential to an intelligent universe. It is the Holy Spirit of God. Here is an article of faith to live by; we are to breath the spirit of truth. Breathing such air means spiritual life—"born of the spirit."

The Holy Spirit Is the Source of Moral Strength.—Again, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as being the Comforter. The word means "one called to one's side," as one is called to help another in need. In other words, the spirit is a helper, the source of strength and power.

Look around you and see how many souls there are in humble life who meet the test of experience with surprising strength. In your own experience, too, you have felt a tightening grip upon your resources. To change the figure, there has welled up within you an unsuspected power, so that you were able to do things that you did not suppose you could do; to endure things that seemed impossible.

From whence did this power come? Was it some sort of spontaneous combustion out of nothing? We know that in the physical world every effect has a cause; but did this great effect in your personality arise without a cause? How much more reasonable to answer, by the instruction of Jesus Christ, that we have drawn on the great reservoir of spiritual power. That helper is the spirit of God present with us. What enthusiasms are possible from such a vital faith! What courage one may draw from such a religion!

We Are All Practical Mystics.—The Standard Dictionary defines mysticism as "The doctrine that truth is obtainable without the aid of the senses and the processes of thought or reason"; and again, "The doctrine and belief that man may attain through contemplation and love to an immediate, direct consciousness of God." In other words mysticism means that the spirit of man, just as Jesus taught, may have immediate contacts with the spirit of God; that the spirit of God may touch directly the spirit of man.

We hasten to join the psychologists in scorn of much that parades under the term of mysticism. Many a time a plain hallucination has been taken for a vision; many a man thinks he sees God when he is simply hungry. Folks make big mistakes in simpler things than this, and it is not at all surprising that people should mix error with truth in this realm. Nevertheless we would not follow the psychologists who "throw out the baby with the water from the bath."

While we discount to the limit the ridiculous claims of those who are mistaken about the meaning of the experiences, let us hold steadfastly to the great realities. The spirit of truth is honest; it will be honest with the mystic. If some one strikes me on the head and I see stars, you properly tell me there were no stars. But do not at the

same time tell me that because the stars which I saw when struck on the head were not real, the stars in the Milky Way are not real. No more should we assert that there are no experiences of God because some claims are false.

Where there is one professed mystic, genuine or mistaken, there are thousands with the purity of heart that sees God; in fact it may be asserted without successful contradiction that every soul possessed of a genuine spirit of truth, honest, sincere, open-minded, does experience immediate contacts with the great spiritual realities of the universe.

Practicing Spirituality.—In practice then, what shall we do? Since it is so easy to be deceived, shall we not abandon all expectation of such experiences? Is this what we do in other realms? It looks to us as though the sun rose in the morning and set in the evening, circling around the earth to do it. We find we are mistaken; what do we do? We check up our experience by our knowledge. We know that some things that taste like good food are poison. We check up our taste by our knowledge and refuse to eat. In our study of psychology we know that certain things which seem real are hallucinations. Let us check up our experience with that knowledge we have and not be misled. We are out on the desert and thirsty. In the distance we see growing trees and streams of water. We are eager to set out to the place of refreshment, but the guide says, No, you are mistaken; that is a mirage. We check up appearances by knowledge and are safe.

Now it is quite possible to do this same thing in the spiritual realm. The experiences of men have pointed out that many things which seem real lead them astray religiously. We do well to check up every vision by the knowledge gained by age-long experiences. On the other hand

we know that there are wholesome spiritual practices, such as sincere worship, honest reflection, association with spiritually minded people and the like, all of which minister through inner promptings, to the finest kind of living.

Moreover, in our practical lives, good thoughts, pure wishes, right purposes are constantly welling up within us. Let us assure ourselves of the fact that these are signs of the presence of God. In the words of Dr. Washington Gladden: "When you found yourself planning some kindness by which another life might be brightened, God was there; when you faced some fault that has troubled you sore with the wish and the resolve to be rid of it, he was there. What sign of his presence could be more credible or more convincing than such an in-kindling of our own best nature? How else could he more closely make himself known to us? It is by recognizing him in these stirrings of our own better selves that we become acquainted with him; that we learn to realize the divine friendship."

The physical sun means life on the earth because of its warmth and light. There is a great spiritual sun in the heavens which fills our world with warmth and light. In that warmth and light the souls of men may tingle with life. That we should abide in that light is the injunction of our great teacher.

If a man could feel
Not one day in the artist's ecstasy
But every day, feast, fast or working day,
The spiritual significance burn through
The hierogylphics of material shows,
Henceforward he would paint the globe with wings.
—ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

IV

ACCEPTING MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

No man is responsible for his own birth. He is not responsible for his color, race or stature. He is not responsible for inherited tendencies. Is he responsible for his temperament, his disposition, his weakness or strength of will? Is he responsible for his moral character?

Upon our answers to these questions will depend largely the nature of our religion; possibly even whether we shall have any religion. Having selected Jesus as our guide we naturally bring this group of questions also to him. Before he answers let us look at the problems more carefully.

Adjusting Religion to Developing Psychology.—The author is not a psychologist. Many who read this book may know even less about that science than he does. But all of us know that tremendous strides are being taken in the understanding of man's inner life. These advances are laying emphasis upon conduct as a consequence of natural forces. Man is thought of as a bundle of instincts associated with a nervous system. He does everything he does because that bundle is stimulated by a maze of influences over which he has no control. Even if we never heard of "behaviorism," most of us wonder whether what we are is not determined by forces beyond our control. If that is so, how can we be held responsible for what we are?

Seeing Character a Matter of Chemistry.—Then the chemist steps in to tell us that our disposition and our character are very largely determined by chemical reactions.

If there is something wrong with the internal glands in a man's body his disposition is affected, as well as his stature and his physical health. Inject a serum of the right kind and he becomes a different man physically and temperamentally; in short, a different character. Why, then, should a man be held responsible for his character when it is a matter of chemistry which he cannot regulate?

Dr. E. E. Slosson, director of Science Service, Washington, D. C., is quoted as saying that "The chemist of the future will turn from his humble task of providing the conveniences of life and gain control of life itself. He may mold stature and character as the sculptor molds his clay. He can turn his attention to the preparation of compounds that will contribute to human welfare instead of woe and stimulate virtues and vices. . . .

"What we value as individuality—fascinating temperaments, charms of vivacity, woe and sympathy—are all due to definite *hormones*, some of which are already known as chemical compounds. Courage is not a matter of 'sand' but of sugar. . . . A variation of a few hundredths of one per cent in the glucose of the blood may make the difference between cowardice and courage, may determine whether a man shall be shot as a slacker or medaled as a hero."

Well, then, what responsibility have I for the kind of character I have? It is the cook or the chemist, and not the preacher, who takes what is given to me by nature and makes it into something different, if it is changed at all. (It is worth noting in passing that the chemist who made the above statements is also a preacher of sermons and a sincere believer in Jesus Christ.)

Now, in so far as we are dominated by the spirit of truth,

we shall welcome every discovery regarding the natural forces that contribute to the making of man. All tested knowledge should be added to our religious concept. We know better than did the Psalmist that man is "fearfully and wonderfully made." The more we know about this wonder the better; but we shall be unscientific, not to say irreligious, if we omit from our list of forces that determine man's life the contribution of the spiritual atmosphere in which that life is bathed. (See Chapter III.) That would be like leaving out of the forces that build the plant the contribution of the rays from the sun. That spiritual contribution begets a creative will in man. He may say "I will" and "I won't." He may add to the contending forces in his nature and environment the deciding factors that determine fundamental character.

We Practice Responsibility in Everyday Life.—Again, on what theory does a real man with a family and without a job operate? He says, It is up to me to find a job. Or what does a business man do who faces competition? He says, I will go and get that business. He is a "go-getter." That is, in practical life we hold the theory that it is "up to us." We know perfectly well that very much depends upon health, intellect, opportunities, associations, and the accidents of life; but we assume that the final responsibility is ours—we are to make the most rather than the least out of everything. Now we need a religion like that to live by. The Christian says, I will learn all I can about myself and my world, but I know that what I am in moral character depends in the last analysis on the exertion of my will.

The Necessity of Effort is a Law of the Spiritual World.—This is one of the natural laws in the spiritual world. William James says, "If a brief definition of ideal or moral

action were required, none could be given which would better fit the appearances than this: It is action in the line of greatest resistance." How are fine characters developed? No man can attain the heights without climbing. In the highly figurative language of the Scripture, Jesus himself could not "sit down at the right hand of God" except by climbing the way of Gethsemane and Calvary. All our lives also get their beauty, dignity and glory through moral effort. The gate is not made narrow just for the sake of keeping people out of heaven. If it were not narrow there would be no souls fit to constitute a heaven. The only way to make a soul worth living is by process of effort.

Watch the struggling of the emperor moth to get out of its cocoon. As it struggles and struggles, the life juices are forced into its wonderfully constructed wings. Gradually its strength develops, and as the cocoon falls away the beautiful creature floats off in the sunlight, a vision of grace and joy. If now in your sympathy for the struggling creature as it begins its effort you take your knife and carefully open the cocoon, the poor bedraggled thing will fall to the ground in a limp and helpless mass, with no strength and no beauty. This is a picture of human character. Passing through the rigors of experience with vigor of effort means strength and beauty of life.

Jesus Taught Responsibility. The first message of Jesus' ministry was "Repent." There could be no repentance were there no responsibility. "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee." Only the most intense sense of responsibility could compel such a course. "If any man willeth" is Jesus' platform on the question of responsibility. He invites us to choose him, to follow him. He bids us put away evil. He challenges us to deny ourselves;

to give ourselves in service; to assume necessary burdens—to take up our daily cross, to face and overcome the rigors of the world. He asserts the ultimate responsibility of man.

Nor is Jesus' position thoughtlessly taken. He sees available resources at hand for any who choose to resist evil. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have eternal life." That means that everyone has adequate backing in determining his course for good. "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you" has its meaning for all. The spiritual realities of which we spoke in the last chapter make it possible for every one to be the master of his own destiny.

All this is not to say that it is an easy thing to lead a Christian life. It would not be worth much to be a Christian if it were easy. It was hard for Peter; it was hard for John; it was too hard for Judas. It is too hard today for the self-seeking; it is impossible for the willing hypocrite. One or two samples of the reiterated statements of Jesus concerning the difficulty of following him will bring many of them to mind. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." "Strive to enter in by the narrow door, for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in and shall not be able."

Just what does Jesus mean when he says, "*Strive* to enter in"? He uses the Greek word *agonizomai,* which is our word "agonize." It literally means to contend in the athletic races. Now on what theory does an athlete go into a contest? Does he say the outcome will depend entirely upon the response of a bundle of instincts in a nervous system to external stimuli, such as the amount of sugar gotten into my blood; or does he say, given these

physical resources, the deciding factor is going to be my will power? He knows perfectly well that while he must have the physical equipment, his own determination, his "agonizing," are going to decide whether or not he does his best, not to say whether or not he wins.

The Christian Aims at Perfection.—Jesus, therefore, set the standards of a Christian life at no lower plane than perfection. "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." This he elaborates with the Christian conception of the non-resistance of evil, love of enemies, forgiveness of enemies, and all the high standards of the Sermon on the Mount.

This means that the ordinary Christian is not to be content so long as he is in any respect imperfect. Of course this means constant struggling. In the words of Robert Browning, "When the fight begins within himself a man's worth something." We may therefore join with St. James in saying, "Count it all joy when ye fall into manifold temptations"; that is, difficulties. Yes, it is really possible to be glad of it when we find that it means constant struggle to follow Jesus Christ.

Applying Religion to Social Standards.—Likewise Jesus sets up the most exacting social standards, and such as are inescapable. Take the Golden Rule; what can any one say against it or against the second great commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"? Down deep in our hearts we know that these are not simply obligations, mechanically prescribed, but laws of our very nature.

Furthermore, being Christian challenges men to provide the just and humane thing for all men in their social organizations. It cuts right across every unbrotherly organization or practice of human kind. It goes to the end of the

earth also and demands of Christian men the establishment and maintenance of Christian international relations. It demands of itself the finding of some way to banish war from the habitation of man.

The Christian Must Be Useful.—Again, following Jesus Christ means being like him in usefulness. "Not to be served but to serve" was the motto of Jesus. He told his disciples plainly that if they wanted to be great men the road of arduous service was the road to travel. We live in a world which offers every opportunity to him who would practice the principle of Christ in serving his fellow men. Human life is a great Jericho road where the wounded call for the personal attention of good Samaritans, and where personal attention may be extended indefinitely through the consecration of one's means to the ministry of mankind.

Thus the whole range of living, from the inner life of the individual to the relations of the nations, calls a man to vigorous living and serving as a follower of Christ.

Taking the Consequences of Responsibility.—We accept, therefore, the position of Jesus that man is responsible for his moral character. The determining factor in a man's conduct is his own choice. He can follow Jesus Christ if he wants to; he may refuse to follow him if he will. Moreover, each man must take the consequences of his own choice, suffering or enjoying the punishments and rewards which follow. These must be conceived of not as arbitrary enactments but as natural consequences.

Living for the Future.—Many of these consequences are enjoyed or suffered day by day in the ordinary human life. Wherever man is found, however, he is discovered to harbor the expectation or hope, perhaps the fear, of a future life. Christian theology has had much to say concerning

future punishment and future bliss. At times these hopes have almost monopolized the thoughts of the church. Again, as in our day, these ideas are relegated to very subordinate positions.

What place have future reward and punishment in a religion to live by? Here the Gospel record is implicit rather than explicit. Jesus clearly holds that the consequences of choices and actions extend beyond physical death. These teachings, however, he puts in parables to stress the central idea, and nowhere does he elaborate on the future life.

"If these things were not so, I would have told you" seems to be central in his thought; and the practical conclusion is, Live as you would live if you knew you were going to live forever. What better position can we take? The elaborate working out of the details of a heavenly life may be interesting but as unprofitable as it is unnecessary. If I live the kind of life I shall be glad I have lived if I live forever, I shall not rob myself of anything worth while in this life; on the contrary, I shall have added much to this life. In fact, I can hardly choose to do anything that would be appropriate to one who would live forever which would not be highly appropriate to one who would live only seventy years. Contrariwise, I could hardly choose not to do anything for fear of the consequences in eternity which it would not be well for me to eschew because of its consequences in time.

We may then give ourselves to any kind of speculation for which we have time and talent. Here, however, our one concern is to find a basis of living to which we can enthusiastically subscribe. Jesus invites us to this basis; namely, "The Practice of Immortality," actually living today as though we expected to live forever.

Practicing Immortality.—On this basis we need not elaborate on any theory of future punishment. Diseased living carries its own punishment here and will carry its own punishment to any life we live beyond. A healthy fear of carrying evil into a higher realm of life may well dominate him who is tempted to choose evil; likewise, a hearty hope of a healthful character which shall go on beyond the limit of physical life is wholesome for any one.

Let us write large, therefore, in our religion to live by, the conviction that each man is responsible for his own soul. By this conviction the Christian shapes his life, energized by the spirit of God.

I would not have a god come in
To shield me suddenly from sin,
And set my house of life to rights;
Nor angels with bright burning wings
Ordering my earthly thoughts and things;
Rather my own frail guttering lights
Windblown and nearly beaten out,
Rather the terror of the nights
And long sick groping after doubt.
Rather be lost than let my soul
Slip vaguely from my own control—
Of my own spirit let me be
In sole, though feeble, mastery.

—SARA TEASDALE

V

STANDING BY ONE ANOTHER

"Stand by one another." This free rendering of the text gives us a truer idea of the meaning than does the exact translation. When we read, "Love one another," it means to us that we ought to be kind to our fellowmen. Of course that is Christian, but evidently Jesus had something quite different in mind.

He had put emphasis upon the great commandments, love of God and love of men, but shortly before he left them he said to them in effect: I am leaving you in an unfriendly world; I am depending upon you to give my message to a needy world. It is a difficult task. Therefore I give you a new commandment, "Stand by one another."

If the disciples had not done that, we should never have heard of the Gospel. Every one of the disciples of Jesus, if he had gone his own way unsupported by his fellows, would have been lost as a follower of Christ. Even the mighty Paul required the reinforcement of comrades.

The Church Is a Necessity.—Here and there and now and then, there may be a man or a woman of sufficient self-assertion and character to stand apart and hold to the principles of Jesus Christ and, perhaps, to proclaim them with power. The great majority must have company. Moreover, if the genius has no following his life is futile. The minute it becomes valuable to mankind there is a following which constitutes a church, whether it is called such or not. Without such a following the Gospel would be useless in the world.

"Do I have to join the church?" These words were shot back at me when I approached my young brother regarding the Christian life. Millions of young people, not to say older people, ask the same question, whether expressed in these or other words. Let us look at this question.

To be a Christian means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. There are two Christians; they follow the same person. There are three; they follow the same guide. There are a thousand; they are following the same leader. As they follow that leader they cannot but draw together, and the minute they draw together you have "the congregation." This was Jesus' word for the church. The congregation or group of similarly minded people following a common leader constitutes the church. When this group grows to a hundred million or to four hundred million, that group still constitutes *the* church. Within that group there may be, there could not help being, subdivisions and multiple organizations. It is perfectly natural that each one of these should be called a church, or a part of the church.

Falling in with Comrades on the Way.—Where, then, does the individual follower of Christ come in? As he walks the way with his leader he falls in with the group, where he naturally comes in contact with others. For him to refuse to have anything to do with them, even for him to neglect to associate with them, is obviously that much of a failure to follow the common leader. In other words, membership in a church of Christ, a part of *the* church of Christ, is a perfectly natural consequence of being a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. That my younger brother speedily became a member of a church, and later a minister of the Gospel, occasions no surprise. The brief answer to our question is, There is something abnormal in your life

if starting out to follow Jesus Christ you do not find yourself in close association with other followers of his; that is, in his church. To withhold that fellowship is to deprive your fellow Christians of something which they need, not to say something that they are entitled to. It is to withhold from yourself something you need. It is also to refrain from full fidelity to the desire of your Master.

Now this matter of standing together is a fundamental necessity of life. If God had not "set the solitary in families," there would be neither families nor solitary persons. The child must have the parent. The association of the family, of the tribe, of the nation, is necessary to the existence of mankind. Without this group cooperation animals would speedily dispose of the life of man, and if animals did not stand by one another they would lose out in the contest with natural forces. Standing together is as necessary a part of living as is eating or breathing.

Group Consciousness Begets Power for Living.—This fundamental law of life is further observed in the strengthening of thought, of feeling, of determination, through the sharing of common thoughts and feelings. Many a man who lacks the gumption to do what he knows is right becomes dynamic with energy when he shares with others his feeling about what is right, especially if that feeling finds some common expression.

We are most familiar with this fact in connection with its evil manifestations because they are dramatic. It is a terrible spectacle to witness a mob of men gathering the fagots and setting them on fire about the living form of a fellow creature, while the throngs of men, women and children utter wild cries of fierce glee at the sight. This is but one instance in which collective feeling compels men

to do what they would lack motive for doing without it. Forget that this is an *evil* consequence in this particular instance. Our concern is with the fact that contagion of feeling mightily augments impulses to action, whatever the type of impulse. The man who without it would do nothing, with it leaves nothing undone in the execution of his purpose.

Group emotion is the fountain head of religious zeal which sometimes develops into fanaticism. It ever needs and is susceptible of rational guidance. This the church should supply. Note what takes place in a congregation of followers of Jesus Christ. Each one believes in his Master; each one really wants to follow his Master, but no one of them has moral character enough to do what he really wants to do. They get together; there is expression of common ideals; contagion spreads; the fire burns; and before long each one of them will do everything to execute his ideals, whereas before he lacked initiative for doing anything.

Choosing One's Group Consciousness.—Let us hasten to recognize the dangers involved and the necessity of the development of individuality, paralleling the development of the power of group feeling. If the man who comes in contact with mob violence has a mind of his own, sees the viciousness of the proposed action and refuses to yield himself to the contagion, the mob spirit has no control over him. Likewise, if the man who comes in contact with a worshiping congregation chooses to resist the idea of noble life and refuses to yield himself to the enthusiasm of spiritual fervor, he will not be moved by the congregation.

On the other hand, if one in the full exercise of his individual judgment decides that a given course is a noble

one, and then associates himself with others who feel the same way; that is, if he *yields* himself to this common group feeling, he harnesses the power of mass psychology to the nobility of individual judgment. That is the practical course for a follower of Jesus Christ.

Group Feeling Is Native to Man.—Moreover, normal human beings cannot escape the influence of mass psychology. The power of associated emotions is elemental in human nature; to suppress it would be to blot out society, and with it man himself. In the unfolding of God's life in the development of man has gone the weaving into him of the gregarious nature. It has been made as much a part of him as the involuntary muscular action by which the heart beats. Feeling is as old as the sentient being; reason is the last and very late born child of nature. In the flow of power through man, therefore, the great volume is necessarily that of instinct and emotion and not that of reason. You and I do not so much bow to the dictates of reason as we are dominated by the sway of feeling, and that feeling finds its power in the mingling of emotions in the group. Man, like the sheep, is a creature of the flock.

In his *Instincts of the Herd*, Trotter says that "man is more sensitive to the voice of the herd than to any other influence . . . it can endow him with energy, courage and endurance . . . it can make him acquiesce in his own punishment and embrace his executioner, submit to poverty, bow to tyranny and sink without complaint under starvation." In other words, the power that resides in group feeling is rooted in the elemental in life.

Reason Should Be in Control.—Does this mean that we are the helpless children of feeling? By no means. Though he may not overpower the might of emotion, man can

harness it and guide it. Man cannot hold back the mountain flood with his hand, but he can dig canals and make the water irrigate his lands rather than sweep away his dwellings. Man may not successfully plead with the electric current not to kill him in passing through his body, but he can attach the wires to his motor and make the current draw his load. So the intellect may not overpower the feelings which animate the group, but it may direct that terrific power into channels where it will expend its full force in the service of man's highest interests. Reason may direct what is in danger of becoming mob violence into exaltation of character and into race-redeeming service. It is a question of putting this power behind worthy motives, deliberately chosen, and this is the function of the congregation, of the church.

To paraphrase the words of Sir Martin Conway,—the elevation of mankind from the level of brutes, how has that been accomplished but by harnessing the power of associated feeling? The vision granted to one man, caught up by his followers and spread to a widening circle, generates a movement whereby it is imposed upon the mass who are thus carried forward. Through ideals so energized, the lower masses of mankind have been and are being elevated, and by that process alone. "The masses of humanity are not to be raised by intellectual effort, nor by science, nor by the labor of individuals. They can be elevated by the infection of fine ideals only; and to these and the fellowships that have incorporated them, the great advance from the beast level to where we now stand has been due." That is, there is no hope for the elevation of the human race except as this power of group feeling is harnessed to idealism. It makes no difference how great a man may be

nor how true his ideals, if he has no followers his life is snuffed out with his death. Jesus himself, without a group of disciples who stood by one another, would never have been heard of.

Stumbling Together in the Church.—Obviously the church is a necessity. But instantly everyone of us thinks of its shortcomings. Perhaps most of us impulsively wish that there were a perfect church. We check ourselves, however, and wonder where our place would be in a perfect church. How often is the difficulty met, "I am not worthy to be a church-member." Who is? Because church members are as unworthy as were Peter and his associates who deserted Jesus in a crisis, the church itself is far from perfect; but it is useful because it associates together imperfect men in common aspirations. As we follow on, stumbling and rising, we fall in with other followers, also stumbling and rising. The imperfect church, therefore, is just the natural consequence of the process by which stumbling men and women seek to make their way upward and onward. Our place is in it. Each of us needs the charitable judgment of every other. The church, in turn, is made up of all of us and needs the charitable judgment of each of us.

There Are Living Values in Church Membership.—By standing with Christians in the church, we strengthen our firmness of purpose; we study the words and life of our Master; we learn from others' failures and successes; we give to others the help and encouragement which they need. Through the church we promote Christian principles in society; we lead others to become Christians by teaching, preaching and personal efforts; we make God real in the lives of men through public worship; we cooperate for the

extension of the Kingdom of God on earth. Finally by banding together in the church we are faithful to the injunction of Jesus himself.

A little church; the settlers come for miles.
Some few, unhearing, sit in selfish dreams;
. . . . . .
But here the most are really worshipers
Seeking in fellowship a sympathy
With God. Their simple faces plainly show
What feelings stir the heart, for hard looks melt,
And thin, worn wretchedness in garb grotesque
Is eased of ugliness while it feeds
On love and hope. This meager hour may lift
Some groveling face to see the blessed sky;
Master a soul, and yield it back to life
Tempered against the evil days to be.

A little thing, this church? Remove its roots,
Ossa upon Pelion would not fill the pit.

—EDWIN FORD PIPER

VI

USING THE BIBLE

The Bible constitutes an introduction to God, calculated to lead earnest souls into personal relations with him, and a guide for living, adequate to provide the foundations of a godly character. We may think of the Bible, therefore, as a book to live by. It is a very interesting collection of ancient literature. It is possible to formulate many theories concerning its origin and authority. We may write books about its place in the world. But our concern with the Bible is in the using of it.

Mere Study of the Bible Is Superficial.—A great many scholars do an immense amount of superficial studying of the Bible. We are not thinking of the superficial scholars; rather of the best scholars. We are not asking whether the results of their investigations are true; doubtless most are. What we do assert is that scholarly study of the Bible is superficial when devoid of practical use of it.

You sit down to a well-laden dinner table, and you are hungry; but you are a scholar. You believe in analyzing foods and knowing their chemical reactions in the human body. You, therefore, insist before you eat this food that it must be analyzed. You are a connoisseur of silverware, and you must inquire about the implements upon the table. By whom were they manufactured, of what are they made, what dates do they bear? So, likewise, the glassware should be investigated: is it imported or domestic? is it cut glass or imitation? what is its history? is it new or does it

bear the glamour of age? And the linen: is it Irish or American? is it machine- or hand-worked? was it in possession of the great-grandmother, or has it just been purchased? And the furniture looks interesting. Are these family heirlooms or what are their histories? So to the degree of absurdity it would be possible for one to refuse to eat until he knew all the interesting things about the dinner and its service. That would be a superficial exercise of intelligence. Practical intelligence says, Eat the dinner. If your doctor has put you under orders, eat carefully; if you wish the good opinion of your hostess, eat politely; but eat. After you have eaten, do all the studying you can.

So with regard to the Bible. The first thing and the constant thing to do with it is to use it. To make it more useful you will find out all you can about it. For nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand, however, the value of the Bible is to be found in the things which are perfectly obvious and whose values lie in living by them. You may hold quite erroneous views concerning many theories of the Bible, and even of the significance of its words, and still profit by its chief values, if you will only use the truth which it brings to you.

Scholarship Has Its Place.—In our day there have been and are being made many very careful and minute studies of the Bible. These studies have certain high values, but misunderstanding about them has been the occasion of serious injury to spiritual life. It may be, however, that the injury has been caused by the conflict between these studies and certain untenable theories about the Scriptures. The result in either case is a serious disturbance of the faith of many. But in a search for a religion to live by we may assume some such basis as given in the first paragraph

and need not be disturbed by irrelevant studies *or* theories.

An old story is told of the drifting of a ladder upon an island inhabited by uncivilized people. Among them there arose great contention concerning it. Some maintained that the sides were intended to hold the rungs together; others that the rungs were intended to hold the sides apart; some said it was a skeleton raft, others that it was a piece of a fence. A shipwrecked sailor appeared, leaned it against a tree, climbed up and picked the fruit. Likewise, one may use the Bible rather than argue about it.

For example, they tell us there are two stories of the creation in Genesis. We turn to them and ask ourselves whether it looks to us as though there were. We may decide that there are two stories. Whether we do or not, the important thing is the assertion of the reality of God at the heart of things. If these chapters lead me to that faith, so that I direct my life accordingly, then the Bible has done its work with me.

Again, there is some light shed on the great fortieth chapter of Isaiah, when with fair accuracy we discover the historical situation which called it forth. It may, however, be disturbing to somebody's conception of the Bible to be told that it was not written by the Isaiah who wrote the sixth chapter of that book. Each of these two great chapters introduces the tremendous fact that the Lord God Almighty is with men. The important thing is that I should become acquainted with him and direct my life accordingly. If either of those chapters helps me to do it, then I may be totally ignorant of all critical questions about them, and still derive the primary value from the Bible. At the same time, everything I may truly learn about them may help me in this very use.

Once more, if the scholars show us that we cannot be sure that Jesus ever said that the Holy Spirit was the spirit of truth in the exact words of the fourth Gospel, shall we conclude that the spirit of truth is not holy or, finding it self-evident as well as wholly sympathetic with the spirit of Jesus, shall we not in the spirit of real truth use it as a vital part of our religion to live by?

Using the Bible Superstitiously.—There is another superficial way to use the Bible, or to misuse it. To make a fetish out of this book is as great a mistake as to confine oneself to critical details. There are those who want the Bible to be to them a book of magic. Take a ludicrous case: a woman whose sincere piety led her to say that she would direct every action of her life by the Bible found herself in a quandary as to whether she should dye a frayed-out skirt or turn it. She said, I will let the Bible decide it for me. She opened the book at random purposing to be guided by the first text that came to her eye. The book opened to the great words, "Turn ye, O turn ye, for why will ye die." To her mind the Lord God had given instructions concerning a detail of her life; but in this travesty of the use of the Bible she missed the tremendous challenge of the word of God to those who have sinned, to turn from their wicked ways and find life. She was given an intellect to use in deciding such questions as what to do with a piece of cloth; she was given the Bible to introduce her to God and guide her in godly living.

Of a piece with the same system as this ludicrous instance is the wresting of texts of Scripture out of their context and making them mean all kinds of things. The average man will do well to read the Bible for himself, get what he can of information concerning the historical setting of the

various sections, and search out the practical truths that are obvious to anyone who is dominated by the spirit of truth.

The theories of the Bible which hold that God has said nothing to man for nineteen hundred years are wrong. Moreover many make claims for the Bible which the Bible never makes for itself, such as the claim of absolute infallibility. In the words of Richard Hooker the old English theologian, popularly known as Judicious Hooker—"As incredible praises given to men do often abate and impair the credit of the deserved commendation, so we must likewise take great heed lest by attributing to Scripture more than it can have, the incredibility of that do cause even those things which it has abundantly to be less reverently esteemed." That is certainly a judicious observation. If I claim everything for the Bible, you are naturally impelled to deny everything about it.

The Scriptures Are Writings of Friends of God.—A helpful conception of the nature of the Bible is to think of it as the writings of men who were acquainted with God. This means that we have in their writings human interpretations, subject to human conditions of actual experiences with the divine person.

When the President of the United States has a conference with newspaper reporters, he exacts the promise that they will not put quotation marks about what they write. This means that when we read the opinions of the President as interpreted by interviewers, we get what these men conceive to be the mind of the President. Now on most important questions, having had these personal interviews, the conception presented will be fairly near to the mind of the President. On some points, however, they will diverge from his actual opinion. These divergences are most often

concerning unimportant things. As a result, the country has a fairly good idea of the state of mind of the President on important issues.

Something like that is the result of the record of men of God of their experiences with God. If I find that on certain details, and even occasionally concerning important things, they were evidently mistaken, it does not invalidate for me the substance and heart of their record. The exceptions apply particularly to subjects which do not involve claims of divine revelation. When the Scripture writers wrote about such things as history or science, they did not say "Thus saith the Lord"; but when they came to the great fundamentals of righteousness, they spoke what they conceived to be his mind. And the common man of today may take these records and find himself coming into vital spiritual experiences which are rightly interpreted as relations with God.

A physician may have occasion to say something about history, but if he makes a mistake in history we do not accuse him of being an unreliable physician. A pilot may know the channel and be able to steer the boat safely, even if he does not know enough geology to name the rocks scientifically. So the prophet may speak God's mind about *righteousness* without being an authority in any other realm.

Interpreting the Bible in the Spirit of Truth.—When we say that the Bible is a book to live by, do we mean we are to live by everything in it? We go to the Old Testament and find the people of God instructed to slay their enemies. Are we therefore to conclude that war is a holy thing and insist on the maintenance of the war system? We hear Jesus say, Give to him that asketh. Does this mean that when an impostor on the streets of an American city asks

for money, we as Christians are to give it to him in spite of the urgent advice of scientific benefactors of mankind that this is the unwisest thing to do?

Note that Jesus depended upon the spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit, to lead us into all truth. If then truth shows that the world is round instead of flat, where the Bible implies the latter, we are to have the freedom wherewith truth makes us free. If the words of Jesus are not clear, if they seem applicable to his own day only, even if we conclude that the New Testament writers misconstrued his mind occasionally, and our sincere, open minds discern these facts, it is the truth that Jesus would have us follow.

There are not a few puzzling questions concerning the Scripture. Most of us will never be able to answer all these questions satisfactorily. We all know, however, that the great truths of the Scripture are food for the soul. This is as unquestioned and as usable as the food on the table of the ordinary American family. The diner may not know much about chemical composition of foods nor of the laws of assimilation, but he knows how to eat. Likewise, we may go to the Bible and be perfectly sure that when it says "Thou shalt not steal," we have something to live by. We know the same thing about every other one of the ten commandments. We are perfectly confident that the Golden Rule is a fine principle; that to love one's neighbor as oneself is wholly dependable as a principle of life. We are equally sure that friendship with God is a good thing. We are confident that Jesus spoke the truth about God when he spoke the parable of the prodigal son. So with reference to all the fundamental and spiritual truths of the Scriptures which we find "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for *instruction, which is in righteousness.*"

The Bible is a Book of the Soul.—The Bible is a book of the soul. I am weary; nowhere else do I hear a sweet, strong voice say "Come unto me and rest." My heart is in turmoil; nowhere else do I hear a firm, quiet voice, "Peace I leave with you." I am borne down by sin; nowhere else do I hear the sentence, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." I am weak and fearful; nowhere else do I receive the assurance, "All power is given unto me . . . lo, I am with you always." The future looms black before me; its mystery frightens me; nowhere else do I receive the direction, "I am the way, the truth and the life." The mists of sorrow settle chill over my soul, with the music of loved voices stilled; nowhere else do I find the answer, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish."

Most important of all, this is the one book in all the world in which we have the record, partial though it be, of the life, the teaching and the death of Jesus of Nazareth. It is the one book for all who read these words which offers a way to God. Practically speaking, none of us has any other introduction to God.

> "What a book is this! Vast and wide as the universe; rooted in the abysses of creation and towering up beyond the blue secrets of the heavens; sunrise and sunset, birth and death, promise and fulfilment, the whole drama of humanity, are all in this book. . . . He who has lost his God can find him again in this book, and he who has never known him is here struck by the breath of the divine word."—HEINE

VII

FACING SPIRITUAL FAILURE

If you take careful aim with a rifle and miss the target, are you to blame? Whether you are to blame or not, if the target is the vital spot on a charging lion, you lose your life under his paw. If your boat capsizes in the middle of a stream and you start to swim to shore but your strength gives out, are you to blame? Blame or no blame, if there is no help near, you sink and lose your life. If you start out on some foolhardy exploit and wise men warn you of the danger, and you lose your life, you are to blame, but the penalty is the same as in either of the other cases.

Sin Is Failure.—"Missing the mark," that is the Bible term for sin. We think of sin as being something for which we are to blame. We think rightly. For the most part "sin" refers to something for which men are guilty. Nevertheless, the word "sin" in its original meaning was simply missing the mark. Anything which meant failure was sin. In the Old Testament the word meaning "missing the mark" is used for "sin" four hundred and eighty-nine times to only fourteen times where all other words are used. In the New Testament the similar word for sin is used some two hundred times, and all other words together only six times. In its essence, then, sin is failure; and failure from whatever cause is ever to be feared and avoided.

Sin Is Soul Sickness.—But every word grows with growing ideas. Sin is something more than simple failure. Sin is an active thing destroying life; it is something like the

germ of disease or the blight of a plant. It lays hold of the moral character of a man and undermines it, as the hookworm, for example, saps a man's strength.

Stanley, the African explorer, reported that some of his men were killed by elephants, but that he lost many more from jiggers. Now the jigger is a tiny insect that creeps under the skin and does its deadly work unobserved. Likewise perverted instincts and moral habits, backed by custom and fanned by appetite, penetrate the moral fiber of men and become known to us only by their effects.

When the French went to Panama to dig a canal they took with them doctors, nurses and medicines, but the fever took doctors and nurses as well as workmen. The French gave up the task. When America went to Panama to dig the canal, in addition to medicine and nurses and doctors, she took dredges for draining the swamps. By stopping the breeding of germ-carrying insects, the enemy of man was overcome and the canal was dug. A religion to live by calls for something that will clean the source of breeding of the malarias of sin. The very nature of a man and of society must be purified of destructive tendencies, habits, instincts, appetites, by mighty incentives which overpower them.

Sin Is Deliberate Evil-Doing.—As defined by Sir Oliver Lodge, sin is "seeing the better and choosing the worse." Again the bogy of "behaviorism" rears its huge bulk. What makes a man choose the worse when he sees the better? Can he be held responsible for what was born in him or for the influences around him which determine his actions? Two roses grow side by side; one of them is attacked by a parasite and blighted; is the rose to blame for that blight? The other is let alone and grows in beauty; is it to be praised for its beauty? One child was born of evil parents

in evil surroundings; another of good parents in fine surroundings; is one to be blamed and the other praised?

Some years ago in the book called "The Silver Crown," Laura Richards painted the story of the "Angel-who-attends-to-things." "I have come to speak to you about your work," said the angel. "It appears to be unsatisfactory." "Indeed," said the man, "I hardly see how that can be; perhaps you will explain." "I will," said the angel. "To begin with, the work is slovenly." "I was born heedless," said the man; "it is a family failing which I have always regretted." "It is ill put together, too," said the angel, "parts do not fit." "I never had an eye for proportion," said the man; "I admit it is unfortunate." "The whole thing is a botch," said the angel. "You have put neither brains nor heart into it, and the result is a ridiculous failure. What do you propose to do about it?" "I credited you with more comprehension," said the man. "My faults, such as they are, were born with me; I am sorry that you do not approve of me, but this is the way I was made. You see?" "I see," said the angel, as he put out a strong white hand, and taking the man by the collar tumbled him neck and crop into the ditch. "What is the meaning of this?" cried the man, as he scrambled out, breathless and dripping. "I never saw such behavior; do you see what you have done? You have ruined my clothes and nearly drowned me besides." "O yes," said the angel. "This is the way I was made."

If I may say that I was "made that way" in explanation of everything I do, I presume the Lord God could also say the same thing when he holds me to strict account. Probably we do not need to go so far afield. Every one of us believes that he does some things because he wants to and

refuses to do some things because he does not want to. So long as we maintain our independence in any other realm we cannot say consistently that we may not freely choose the evil even when we see the good. That is sin in its enormity. It is defiance of God. We should not minimize the tremendous forces which play against us to drive us one way or the other, but when we have recognized them in their full force we must also recognize the majesty of our creative wills and accept the guilt of sin.

Sin Blasts Character.—It is said, whether truly or not is immaterial, that Leonardo da Vinci when painting the great masterpiece, "The Lord's Supper," sought long for a face which he could incorporate in the picture as that of the Christ. This face was finally found in a singer in the choir of the Milan Cathedral. A greater difficulty confronted the artist when he endeavored to find a countenance which would adequately represent the face of the traitor. For ten years he searched and finally discovered a prisoner in Rome who met the requirements, and the picture was painted. Afterward it was found that the man who posed for the face of Judas was the same man who posed for the face of Christ. Ten years of crime had transformed him.

Possibly no better picture of the enormity of sin could be given than the realization of the fact that Jesus himself might have chosen courses which would have transformed him into a Judas. The remorse of the traitor in hanging himself does not exaggerate the pain of penitence of one who comes to realize that he has blasted a character capable of the status of a child of God. If we would have a religion to live by, our religion should demand of us the assumption of responsibility for sin. We are to blame for the evil that is in our lives, especially when a way to freedom is offered.

Jesus' Call to the Sinner.—"Cheer up, and hear good news!" This is the gist of the first sermon which Jesus preached. "Repent, and believe the Gospel," was the burden of that message. We misunderstand it because we think that "repentance" always involves painful remorse. Now "to repent" means to "change one's mind." The nature of the error in thought therefore determines the nature of the repentance. If a man thinks himself rich when he is poor, to learn the truth means anguish. If he thinks himself in poverty when he is rich, to discover the truth is to rejoice. He who thinks there is no God, and therefore riots in sin, awakes to the truth with terror. He who thinks God cold and merciless toward his failing creatures learns with joy that he is a loving Father who welcomes every prodigal. This is the cheering announcement that Jesus makes; it is good news of great joy. *The Lord God of the universe is on the side of the man who wants to make the right choice.* He says to every one who sees the enormity of sin and is hopeless,—"Change your mind. You are mistaken; God is not merciless, he is your loving Father. Let hope take the place of despair, for God joins you in your desire to be different."

A friend once showed to John Ruskin a fine handworked handkerchief which had been ruined by a blot of ink. Ruskin asked if he might have the handkerchief. It was given to him. Some days later he brought it back to the friend bearing a beautiful design which greatly enhanced its original value; and lo, the blot was the heart of that design. The figure is true to the spiritual fact that God may take a character which has been blotted and convert that very blight into beauty. A case in point is that of the person who having passed through the experiences of evil

and on into the knowledge of the goodness of God, develops a fine sympathy for men, which those who have never known devious ways do not attain to. This is not to advocate that men should do evil in order that good may come; quite the contrary, for sin has its recompense, and too often also the evil holds its grip; but it is to speak courage to any who mourn the blight that is on their lives. That is a part of the religion of him whom we follow; it is a good religion to live by. The man who is possessed by that idea will turn from evil to righteousness, and as he turns he will find his helper near.

The High Function of the Saviour.—You swim out beyond your depth and a life saver reaches you just as you are going down for the last time. He is a saviour. You are desperately sick; a practiced physician prescribes exactly the right treatment; you get well. He is a saviour. You are in debt; bankruptcy faces you; some friend comes to your assistance with adequate loans. He is a saviour. In a moment of anger you are about to commit some crime which would send you to prison and perhaps death; a friend intervenes; regardless of costs he prevents your rash act and brings you to your right mind. He is a saviour.

Now in the world of moral and spiritual reality men get into conditions where they cannot control consequences. Jesus Christ enters their lives and saves them from those conditions, making possible the finest life, unsullied moral health, genuine relationships with the infinite and consequent immortal life. He is the Saviour.

Every one of us misses the mark. Are you as efficient as you ought to be, as successful as you might be, as generous as is possible, as kind, congenial, helpful, faithful and upright as it is possible for one of your nature to be? If

not, then you are a sinner. You need a saviour who will motivate these qualities. Jesus Christ is that Saviour. Attention to him will furnish in you the motivation.

Again, as sickness, sin may poison or infect the soul. Conscience may become impaired; will power may be weakened; moral judgment may be perverted, and most serious of all, the heart's affection may be vitiated; that is, the soul is sick just as the body is sometimes sick; it needs a physician. Jesus Christ is that physician, not for those who have no realization of need but for those who have. Now he who absorbs the message and spirit of Christ finds conscience quickened, moral judgment enlightened, will energized, spiritual health vibrating in his being, affections purified and centered upon the highest. To such a man Christ is the Saviour.

Once more, sin is a personal matter; it is being on bad terms with God. In the sight of the law, the law-breaker is a sinner; in the sight of a friend, the unfaithful is a sinner; in the eyes of the nation, a rebel or traitor is a sinner; in the eyes of God, one who turns his back on him is a sinner. What is needed is some one who shall make friends between such a man and God. This is the position that Jesus Christ occupies. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." To get acquainted with him is to be introduced to the friendship of God.

If we are seeking a religion to live by, we need not worry about the process and its metaphysical mysteries so long as we find it to be true that when a man takes an interest in Jesus Christ, becomes familiar with him through the study of the Gospels, seeks sympathetically to understand his teachings and spirit, lends himself to his leadership,—in short, trusts or "believes in" Jesus Christ, he is instigated and

inspired to successful living. He becomes a friend of God.

Therefore as we seek a religion to live by, the call is for every one who senses his shortcomings and desires to make good, to breathe in the message and spirit of Jesus Christ, thereby finding strength in weakness, health for spiritual sickness and divine friendship in place of enmity or fear.

> That none but gods could build this house of ours,
> So beautiful, vast, various, so beyond
> All work of man, yet, like all work of man,
> A beauty with defect—till That which knows,
> And is not known, but felt thro' what we feel
> Within ourselves is highest, shall descend
> On this half-deed, and shape it at the last
> According to the Highest in the Highest.
>
> —TENNYSON

VIII

DISCOVERING GOD'S HEART ON CALVARY

The first witnesses of the death of Jesus had no theory by which to interpret it. That spectacle, however, made a mighty impression upon them. It produced a powerful effect in their lives. It will do the same thing today. Let the ordinary man follow Jesus through the four Gospels sympathetically, giving him the natural approval that his life calls for, then let him read the record of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus with responsive heart and free imagination. There is sure to be the stirring of deep emotions. If now those emotions are harnessed to devotion to Jesus and resolution to be like him, they are bound to be mighty in life. This will be true with or without any particular theory of the meaning of that tragic spectacle; but if there can be found a compelling conception of the deepest significance of the cross, it should add much to its power over life. If the considerations now to be set forth help the follower of Christ, let him add them to his religion to live by; if they do not help in Christian living, let him ignore them. Similarly let every theory be dismissed which does not help life. Remember that the essential thing is to follow Jesus Christ.

Jesus' Conception of the Atonement. -When we turn to the Gospel record for our thought of the atonement we find suggestive figures used by Jesus rather than any developed theory. Here as always we need to remember that the spirit of truth is to lead us. We need also to bear in mind

that the statement of truths for one generation may need to be quite different from the statement of those same truths for another generation. When Paul was preaching concerning the cross, for his hearers the bloody sacrifice was an essential part of religious ceremony. For none of us is such a sacrifice any part of our religious exercises. Paul could not have preached intelligently without preaching in terms of the altar. For us to preach in terms of the altar means either misunderstanding or the necessity of careful explanation of our meaning.

For Paul to have preached in terms of cause and effect, that is in terms of chemistry, biology, psychology, etc., would have been foolishness. For us to preach without the introduction of these great conceptions of our day would be to deprive ourselves of the vehicles of understanding most potent for our generation. Unless there be in the Cross of Christ that which produces an effect, it will mean little to us. It must produce an effect just as truly as fertilizing the soil produces an effect in the crops; as the injection of serums into the blood produces an effect on a sick man; as the introduction of psychological motives changes the choices of men. If the Cross of Christ is to mean anything for our day, it must be shown to contribute something that will produce an effect upon persons. Now the historical theories of the atonement have held or implied that the cross made a difference in God's feelings and actions toward men, and also in man's attitude toward God. We ask first of all therefore:

What Effect Has the Cross of Christ on God?—Did the dying of Jesus on Calvary make God a better God than he otherwise would have been? Is God more kindly toward me, more lenient with my shortcomings, more forgiving

toward my sins because Jesus died on the Cross? Is he more generously disposed toward you and me who live after Calvary than he was toward David or Abraham who lived before the crucifixion of Jesus? Did the Cross of Jesus Christ have an actual effect upon God?

The old theory said that the death of Christ paid the debt which sinful men owed to God. To speak bluntly, it was like getting a receipt from him for what we owed him. Probably that means little to us today. There was a day when prisoners were released because other people took their places in prison. That is not done today; it does not seem to us to be a fair thing to do; so the "ransom" theory is not very helpful in our lives today.

At another time the death of Jesus was conceived of as appeasing the wrath of God. God was angry; he saw the suffering of one he loved and his heart was mellowed. Doubtless our conceptions of God are such that this seems quite beside the mark. Yet we are under obligation to find statements which will be powerful for us. Probably we shall do well to begin with things which move men if we are to think clearly of what matters to God.

The Psychology of Forgiveness.—An old story from actual life may help us: A young man had done wrong and been sent to prison. On his release he was looked upon as a jailbird. His acquaintances did not have confidence in him. There was one man, however, a merchant, who said, I will trust that young man and give him a chance. He took him into his business with him; gave him responsibility. After some months it was found that the young man had been robbing the firm; what was worse, he had been doing it in such a way as to undermine the confidence of the community in the concern. Naturally

his benefactor resented such conduct. He found bitterness in his heart. He attempted to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive . . .," but the words would stick in his throat. He could not forgive that young man. The offender was tried and sentenced to prison, and still the bitterness remained in the heart of this Christian man. He clenched his fists as he thought of him. Then came the word that the family of this wrong-doer were sick and suffering. His heart was touched. He went to the home and found them cold without fuel, hungry without food, and sick without attention. He called the doctor, he ordered coal, he secured food, he gave personal attention; and before he knew it, he found himself praying his prayer of forgiveness with joy. That is, the doing of a costly kindness had produced a psychological effect; it had begotten the spirit of forgiveness. Now, is there anything in the death of Christ that has a similar effect in producing the spirit of forgiveness in the heart of God? We are probably answering instantly that the spirit of forgiveness always was in the heart of God; that he needed no cross to beget it. But we must go on and say that Jesus also was always in the heart of God, and we may add in the figurative language of Revelation that the Lamb of God was "slain from the foundation of the world."

Then if God does not need to do costly kindnesses in order to *produce* the spirit of forgiveness because he already has it, must it not be that having that spirit of forgiveness he must of necessity do costly kindnesses or lose it? How can he help doing them if that is his nature? How could that spirit live if denied expression? We seem to have arrived at the conviction that when Christ died on the Cross, God was suffering. It was a clear revelation of

the fact that the sin of his children always causes pain to the heart of the Father, and that their Father ever cherishes toward them a forgiving spirit. Jesus made it plain: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

We know that this is a clumsy statement. It calls for chapters of explanation; but if even dimly we have glimpsed the great fact that the heart of God is like the heart of Jesus when on the Cross he prayed, "Father, forgive them," and that the sins which I commit produce an effect on God like the sufferings of Jesus on Calvary, we have sighted a mighty motivating conception, one calculated to work deep changes in character.

How can I do otherwise than hate any sin which means pain for God? How can I do otherwise than turn from it, when I have such assurance that God will welcome me more heartily than the father welcomed the prodigal son? However short this may come of the great truths we are feeling after, we have in it a religion to live by. It challenges us to hate sin; it assures us of forgiveness when we repent. What shall we say, then, with regard to the effect of the Cross on God? Only this: Since "God was in Christ," God himself was living out his own nature on the cross, and as is true of all living beings, such expression of his nature ever perpetuates in him his forgiving spirit. Without such expression that spirit would expire. In other words, the cross means that his sacrificial forgiveness keeps God merciful. That sacrificial spirit is eternal in the heart of God, and Calvary is the sublime revelation of the heart of the Infinite.

What Effect Has the Cross on Man?—Remember, we are looking for forces which produce actual results rather than for mysteries. In our ordinary life we learn practical

processes through which results are produced by causes. That is the kind of thing we are looking for when we are seeking a theory of the atonement to live by.

The Principles of Friendship Are Involved in Atonement.—The result we are asking for is *friendship between God and man.* Religion should furnish the forces which establish and develop that friendship. The atonement of the Cross of Christ is central to those forces. The heart of the atonement is reconciliation or the making of friends, in the broadest meaning of that term. It involves the introduction of strangers and the making friends of enemies.

We conceive of four reasons why two persons might not be friends: (1) *ignorance* of each other's existence; (2) *disinterestedness* in each other's life; (3) the conception that one is in a higher *class* than the other; (4) *enmity,* especially when based upon wrong-doing.

Now anything which comes in and makes friends of two persons who, for whatever reason, are not friends is working reconciliation. To do this forces must be introduced, forces which will make strangers acquainted with each other; develop common interest where there has been none; remove any feeling of class distinction; and, hardest of all, banish enmity even when founded upon wrong-doing. These forces are exactly what Christ brings through his Cross, working reconciliation between God and men by the revelation of the heart of God.

Acquainting Men with God.—I pass along the busy street meeting man after man, no one of whom I know. I have no particular interest in them because I do not know them. Perhaps I do the same thing with reference to God I move about in his world; he is here on every hand, in the flower, in the tree, in the grass, in the birds, in the

beasts, in the sunshine, in the stars, in the universe, in my fellowmen, in myself; but I take him as a matter of course. I have no realization that there is here a personal presence. I have no desire for conversation with him, because it has not occurred to me that I could converse with him.

Then the Cross looms athwart my path. It demands attention. Over it are written the words, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Can it be that the Creator and Sustainer of the universe is as passionately interested in me and in each of his children as Jesus was when he "died for men"? Instantly we see that God is more than a manufacturer, creating the universe. He is more than a great electric current animating things. He is more than a great king interested in men in mass, if at all. He is more than all power, all wisdom, all intelligence. He is something more than just and holy. He is as tender as a mother, as gentle, as forgiving, as self-sacrificing, as Jesus. Whatever else, therefore, the Cross of Christ is or does, it makes us see the heart of the heavenly Father. It introduces us to God.

Interesting Men in God.—If two who are strangers to each other are to become friends, they must become interested in each other. In the terms of President King, friendship involves mutual *interests*, mutual *self-revelation*, mutual *trust* and mutual *self-surrender*.

We had not thought that God was particularly *interested* in the things which interest us. Surely he must be too much occupied with an infinite universe on his hands to give particular attention to us. Nor would he care, we are prone to think, to have us take any particular interest in his affairs. How could we expect the mind of the universe to *reveal himself* to us and listen to our communica-

tions to him? Certainly we could hardly expect him to make any *surrender* on his part, even if he cared to have us surrender to him. As for his *trusting* us, our neighbors are none too trustful of us, and we scarcely trust ourselves.

Then the Cross challenges us. Remembering that when we see Jesus we see the Father, here is evidence that he is deeply *interested* in us, that he really *trusts* us, that he actually *surrenders* to us; in short, that he comes more than half way to meet us in friendship. Here is a great heart beating for man. When Jesus said "Father, forgive them," he revealed the fact that always and everywhere the disposition of God is that of mercy.

Sensing this great revelation furnishes to man the "impulsive and propulsive power of a new affection" which makes new men of us. Jesus realized this when he said "And I, if I be lifted up . . ., will draw all men unto me." Paul experienced it when he said "The love of Christ constraineth us." So when today the Cross of Jesus is held up before men, when its true significance as the revelation of the heart of God is made known, the honest-minded man becomes interested in God; he trusts God; he yields himself to God; he is made friendly toward God; he is conscious of the forgiveness of God; he is reconciled to God.

Revealing the Democracy of God.—Our experience in human society naturally makes us feel that God must be an aristocrat. Surely he belongs to the upper class, and the upper classes have little dealing with the lower classes. When the prophets have seen him, has he not been shown high and lifted up? Must we not say as we approach his seat, "Holy, holy, holy"? In contrast our lives are insignificant, and we cannot but be conscious of our shortcomings. Must not God look upon us, therefore, as of little consequence to him?

Then the Cross meets our astonished gaze. On it we see him who is one with God. The great heart of the universe is like the heart of Christ. What does this mean for us? It means that there is no child of God so humble that he will find God unapproachable. It means that we are as welcome in the inner circle of God's life, so to speak, as were the little children welcome in the arms of Jesus. It means that he pities his faltering and failing ones as a good father pities his children; in short, it means that we may draw near and be actual friends of God. This is reconciliation—atonement.

Making Sinners Friends of God.—If we are to forsake our sins, it will be because of genuine repentance. If we truly repent, it will be because of some inciting cause, something that arouses us to repentance. If we truly repent of our sins, it means reformation. If there is true reformation, the merciful God is just to forgive us our sins. Here is where the Cross performs its function: it reveals the awfulness of sin on the one hand with so much force, and the beauty of God's mercy on the other hand with such power that the sincere soul finds himself naturally in a spirit of repentance and powerfully incited to turn from evil to good. Can any one with open mind contemplate the crucifixion without such results?

The Cross is an eternal fact. It means that always and everywhere evil-doing causes in God, who loves as Jesus loved, pain such as Jesus suffered on the Cross. Can God suffer pain? We have no better way of expressing it. That which is akin to pain in man, necessarily modified by the nature of God, is suffered by him whenever I sin. It has always been so; it always will be so. That is the meaning of the Cross. There is something real, therefore,

in the "patripassianism" of the third century, in which the early Christian fathers preached the doctrine that in the suffering of Christ on the Cross the Father was suffering. The passion of Christ was the passion of his Father; therefore, an eternal passion, an eternal atonement.

To bring it down to more common terms, the Cross means that God suffers the consequences of our sins and forgives, if we but turn from them and become his friends. This is the heart of the message of Jesus as given to us in the parable of the prodigal son. The father takes the loss, buries in his own heart the shame, welcomes the returning prodigal with open arms, and puts him in the place of joy and future usefulness. Believe or refuse to believe any theories of the atonement, so long as you practice this lesson of the Cross.

Lord of thyself and me, through the sore grief
Which thou didst bear to bring us back to God,
Or, rather, bear in being unto us
Thy own pure shining self of love and truth!
When I have learned to think thy radiant thoughts,
To live the truth beyond the power to know it,
To bear my light as thou thy heavy Cross,
. . . . . .
When I have lost myself in other men,
And found myself in thee—the Father then
Will come with thee and will abide with me.

—George Macdonald

IX

FINDING NEW CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER

According to scientists and philosophers, we are living in the midst of "the greatest revolution in thought that the world has ever known." It is not surprising, therefore, that the reasonableness of prayer is being questioned by not a few lovers of the truth, including many to whom prayer is most precious.

You are traveling in Tibet, for example, and in the water brooks you see revolving wheels bearing written prayers. You look up and the windmills are whirling prayers, while flags are fluttering prayers. You see a pile of stones in the roadway; prayers are written upon them. Childlike souls think that God will hear and answer if they address him thus. How foolish these Tibetans are! Yet to many honest minds today, much of the praying of Christians seems no less foolish. To the critical mind these prayers seem childish.

Is It Not Childish to Pray?—Yes, it is as childish, or better, as *childlike*, for a spiritual child of God to talk to his heavenly Father as it is for a human child to talk to his human father. How simple-minded are the requests of our little children, but we wouldn't stop them for the world. Neither would God stop his children from talking to him. Your child asks you for something necessary to his life; of course you would give it to him if he didn't ask. Then he goes on and prefers all kinds of ridiculous requests, at which you smile and which of course you do not grant.

You would not stop his talking though, for there is real value in this high process.

It would be surprising if there were not more of child-likeness as between an infinite Father and his spiritual children than there is between a human father and his human child. But in this much larger relationship there is just as much reason for encouraging the instinct for conversation as there is in the human relationship. Yes, prayer is childlike, and "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." So when you are ready to forbid your child to speak until he can speak only wisdom, then you may consistently deride prayer because our spiritual wisdom is so limited.

Our Difficulties Regarding Prayer.—But coming nearer to the heart of the matter, honest minds are greatly troubled regarding the reasonableness of prayer. Doubtless this is largely because of our conception of the world in which we live. We know we are in a universe controlled by law. Every effect has its adequate cause; from the infinitesimal electron in the atom to the whirling galaxies of the starry heavens, all is under absolute control of law. What hope has a puny human will to change things by its wishes in a world like this!

Then we think of God in his greatness. How presumptuous for an insignificant man to attempt to bend his will! Moreover God knows what is best; why should we undertake to instruct him? Again, his love is perfect; why should we need to influence him to be good? In the face of such considerations the sincere mind is puzzled. There is the desire to pray, but it seems foolish.

Adopting a Key to the Philosophy of Prayer.—It may help us in our search to start with some idea that seems perfectly plain and which may serve as a key to the prob-

lem. A very simple one is suggested. *It is not good for God to be alone.* (Meditate on this until it is seen to be wholly true.) When we find in the record of Genesis the statement, "It is not good for man to be alone," we agree instantly. Our imagination takes a quick flight endeavoring to think of a man alone; no human face upon which to look, no human voice to hear, no human intellect with which to hold intercourse. Surely it would not be good for man to be alone. By the same token, "It is not good for *God* to be alone." The very fact that this is a social world cries aloud that God is a social being; nor may we plead that he does not need us because there are many other beings with whom he may keep company; for God is a perfect social being and cannot be content to be a stranger to any one. We should have to call him less than perfect if he were. No, as between him and me, it is as though there were no other. If he is a social being, that fact demands intercourse with me.

Prayer Is the Expression of Friendship.—God requires company, and prayer is the means of intercourse. This being the case the essence of prayer is not to be found in petition but in friendship. Now beggary is not friendship in form most refined. It is true that we sometimes ask our friends to do things for us, but this constitutes a very insignificant part of friendship. We make a mistake when we think of prayer as consisting chiefly in asking God to do something for us. Jesus' position was that God knows what we have need of before we ask him. As children, however, we may ask and please him by doing so. Then, having received, there remains the expression of gratitude.

If because this is a law-governed universe, and if, because God is all-powerful, all-wise and all-loving, we conclude

there is little room for asking God for anything and therefore maintain that there is no place for prayer, then to be consistent we must contend that in all human relations there is no place for conversation when there is no occasion for asking favors. If we may say that children should not speak to parents, that wife should not speak to husband, except to ask for something, then we may say that there is no place for conversation with our heavenly Father. Seeing the ridiculousness of this conclusion, we have full agreement with the Psalmist when he says, "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him." If prayer brings us into the presence of God, then it has a supreme function to perform, whether there is need of petition or not. It is the practice of friendship between God and man.

Man Can Speak God's Language.—Thought about prayer in another line troubles some. Is not the life of God of an entirely different order from that of man? If it is, can there be any friendship between them? God is thought of as wholly spiritual; man appears to be physical, or at best, a spirit-charged body. Are not all of man's communications physical? A man speaks; that is, his *tongue* sets the air in vibration. Another man's *ears* pick up those vibrations and report them to the *brain*. But if God is *spiritual,* are such means of communication available? If not, has man any way of conversing with God as a spirit? If he has, we should expect him to use that same means on occasion as between man and man. Now there are those who interpret certain human experiences to that effect.

Permit a personal reference: A few years ago I went with my young sons to a summer cottage on Lake Champlain, while my wife and daughter remained in our home

in New York, three hundred miles away. After midnight on one occasion a terrific storm arose, with the dense blackness punctured now and again with fierce flashes of lightning and crashing peals of thunder. Waking from sleep I thought first of the boys at the other end of the cottage. Were their windows closed? Were they frightened? As I made my way stumblingly in the black darkness, quicker than thought two balls of fire flashed in my pathway, accompanied by a deafening roar. A man weighing over two hundred pounds does not easily confess to nervousness, but that night I trembled at the flash and the crash. I found the boys safe and unafraid. I closed their windows and went back to bed. I cannot say that I went calmly, nor that I fell asleep instantly. Every nerve was atingle. In the morning it was found that the house had been struck by lightning; just enough damage had been done to make it interesting.

When the news of this event was written to the wife and mother, word came back instanter that she knew all about it; at that very hour there had come a waking dream in which the husband and father had been struck by lightning. Query: Is it possible that a human being when properly stirred and sufficiently dynamic may broadcast experiences and feelings to another human being, properly tuned in by sympathy and interest?

I am sure of one thing; namely, that it is quite possible to lose one's head over psychic phenomena. Recognizing need of caution, it is to be observed that scientific groups have collected such a volume of evidence on the matter that thought transference, or telepathy, has come to be recognized by a good many scientific men. Does it not seem as reasonable that mind should be able to produce an effect

upon mind as that a discharge of electricity should be able to produce an effect upon an electrical instrument, such as we have in radio?

The one point upon which I wish to insist, however, is that it is quite reasonable to hold that the mind of God (who is spirit) is "able to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart"; that is, that the feelings of my inner self may project themselves into the consciousness of God, and that likewise the mind of God may impinge upon my mind in such manner as shall make his life effective in mine. If this is true, then prayer has a substantial basis; that is, it is possible for mind to communicate with mind without employing words or gestures which are useful, however, in so far as they help the activity of the mind. My mind may reach God's and God's mind may reach mine, making spiritual friendship possible even though the life of God is of a different order from my own.

Jesus Expected Results from Prayer.—Though we may concede that friendship and not begging is the essence of prayer, nevertheless we cannot get away from the fact that Jesus taught that true prayer produced results. "Ask and ye shall receive; seek and yet shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you." Jesus clearly says that if we ask, God will do things which otherwise he would not do. Now this is not to make unreasonable claims. This does not mean that God will shatter the laws of the universe at the request of men. It is hard to see how he could consistently change the order of natural events in answer to prayer. Until we know everything, however, we may not deny even that possibility. Here we suspend judgment. But when we come to spiritual matters, it is not difficult to conceive of a self-determining spiritual God, directly affecting the

spirits of men. If a man lacks courage, we can readily conceive that a direct action on the part of God might give him that courage. Similarly, good might come from him in numberless particulars without ever entering the realm where we are troubled by the reign of natural law; in fact, all of this would be under the reign of law, for direct action by a free being is according to the laws of freedom.

We should not leave the subject of the power of prayer without observing that there are possibilities in the field of psychic powers where prayer may be the legitimate exercise of the native powers of the souls of men. Our bodies, for example, subject as they are to disorders, are subject also in no small measure to the correction of those disorders by mental and spiritual forces. Nor is it far-fetched to say that the proper avenue of approach in the exercise of these spiritual powers is by way of the throne of God, since every man is a part of him. The scientist, therefore, may consistently pray for the control of the right spirit over the conditions of his body; he may go further and pray for the same control over the minds and bodies of his friends. He becomes unscientific—by which we mean unreasonable—if he asks God to shatter the framework of his own universe and perhaps sacrifice the good of his other children by infraction of the laws of that universe. Only disorder and pandemonium would result from the granting of rain at the request of one and sunshine at the request of another. Better far for all his children that the ordered universe should continue to be an ordered universe rather than that he should interfere at the whim, or even at the wisdom, of his earthly children. But after all this is said it should be noted that man changes things at will within limits. It is reasonable,

therefore, to assume that God changes things at will, limited only by the laws of necessity in an ordered world. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that man who changes things and God who changes things should be able to cooperate in making things different in realms of common interest. This being possible, and the exercise of freedom being the highest form of action we know, is there not obligation on the part of both to take account each of the other's wishes? This brings us into the realm of ethics on a sublime scale.

God's Obligations and Limitations.—Jesus told his disciples that men *ought* always to pray and not to faint; that is, they are under obligation to pray. But in a social universe obligation is reciprocal. Is there really any obligation on God's part to cooperate? Let us apply our key, "It is not good *for God* to be alone." If God is a social being and brings into existence a social world, are there not obligations resting upon him to take part in the social intercourse of that world? This is exactly what we conceive to be the situation. God is eager to fulfil the obligations of social order, for only so can he be true to the highest ideals, just as is the case with man; he cannot excuse himself from moral laws which men must observe.

God, then, may not act on the basis of his own choice alone. He is in some real sense under obligation to consult the wishes of the others whom he has chosen to associate with himself in a social order. If we were speaking of men we should have no hesitancy in making this assertion. Man has repudiated the principle of egoism and maintains that selfishness is suicidal while altruism is fertile in the production of good. Now shall we conceive of God as acting on a lower plane? Shall we demand of men

recognition of the true principles of altruism and concede to God the privilege of acting on the unadulterated principle of egoism, and still conceive of him as being a real and good unit in a genuine social order? If we are to demand of God that he should be as good as we demand that righteous men shall be, it is ethically incumbent upon him to recognize the desires of his creatures. Yes, because his goodness transcends that selfishness which would live apart in the eternal lonesomeness of absolute sovereignty, uncounseled by the will of others, he is under necessity to listen when his children pray.

Loosing the Hands of God.—Again, it is quite possible to conceive that on the basis of respect for the will of others God might not be free to do things which he himself would choose to do. If, however, I join my wish with his, his action becomes altruistic rather than egoistic. He may be able to do to me and for me at my request things which as a social being he would not be free to do without my request. Moreover he might be liberated to do to or for another man, if I requested it, what of his own free will he could not do, because it would be imposing his solitary will upon the will of another. But if I join my will with his, his freedom of action is on the basis of altruism rather than of egoism; in other words, it is possible for the human wish to bind or release the divine wish.

It is like the rule of a democracy; the government under a democracy is bound to act or not to act according to the vote of the majority. If this is a social universe in which God grants real citizenship to his creatures, then the government which centers in himself must abide by the suffrage of the people. This sounds so mechanical that it is almost blasphemous, but does it not express a real truth,

namely, that having made man free, man's freedom should be honored; that giving him a voice it should not be mocked? This being true the hands of God are tied until the desires of men release them. It is this idea which Angela Morgan embodies in her poem, entitled "God Prays," which grew out of the awful times of war when men were wont to ask why God did not arise and control the wrath of man:

> "And the Lord God whispered and said to me,
> 'These things shall be, these things shall be,
> Nor help shall come from the scarlet skies,
> Till the people rise!
> Till the people rise, my arm is weak;
> I cannot speak till the people speak;
> When men are dumb, my voice is dumb—
> I cannot come till my people come.'
> And the Lord God's presence was white, so white,
> Like a pillar of stars against the night,
> 'Millions on millions pray to me
> Yet hearken not to hear me pray;
> Nor comes there any to set me free
> Of all who plead from night to day.
> So God is mute and Heaven is still
> While the nations kill.'"[1]

How then do I dare refrain from praying? In some real sense I seem to be condemning God to inaction by failing to express my will. Remembering always that our wishes are to be associated with his, that we are ever to say "Nevertheless not my will but thine be done," prayer is as important as the perfection of providence is desirable. We are bound, therefore, to prompt ourselves in its practice with keen zest.

We do not flatter ourselves that we have fathomed the depths of the secrets of prayer. We do feel humbly that

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we have felt our way far enough into its reality to make its practice a very real and reasonable thing. In short, we have in our faith in prayer a religion to live by.

. . . More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friends?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
—TENNYSON

X

TRANSFORMING LIFE THROUGH WORSHIP

"The service of worship" occupies much of the attention of the church. It consists of a wide variety of exercises, from the most ornate and ritualistic to the most informal and even spasmodic. Are these exercises simply inheritances from the past, or are they vital with meaning for the man of today?

Central to the thought of worship is the honoring of God, but this critical age dares to ask whether God cares to be honored. Does God like to be complimented? Is the central soul of the universe hungry for praise? Put it the other way; do I not need to honor him, or have I no sense of appreciation of him, no admiration for what he is and does? Am I stirred by no feelings in his presence? Shall I be happier if I conclude that God is cold and indifferent to all expressions of emotion toward him?

Since we are to understand God by what he does, the best place to look for answers to such questions is in what he has put into man. One may begin with himself and frankly say, I detest flattery but I am not at all slow to acknowledge that I enjoy sincere appreciation of myself. Every normal human being is built that way. Now since human beings derive their natures from God, we may be sure there is at the center of God's life capacity to enjoy appreciation of himself and his work, and that therefore worship is fundamental to normal relations with God.

What We Mean by Worship.—But just what do we mean

by "worship"? For this discussion we mean *the expression of the feelings which result from intercourse with God.* When we have interviews with great personalities, emotions are sure to be stirred. A normal person is also sure to give *expression* to those feelings. If, now, a man has an interview with God, feeling is bound to be developed and expression of that feeling is the natural consequence. That interview may be more or less conscious. We commune with nature; we think of it vaguely as intercourse with God; we commune with our own hearts and feel more definitely, perhaps, that God is there. But even though the intercourse be somewhat ill defined, for every one there is some sense of contact with the Infinite. Worship cannot exist without this sense of intercourse. We have, therefore, three things to think of: *intercourse* with God, the resulting *feeling*, and the *expression* of that feeling.

Worship is Born of Intercourse with God.—We think of worship as connected with services of the church. It may be possible to enter a church without having had any consciousness of God, find consciousness of him there, experience deep feeling and give appropriate expression to that feeling. That process is infinitely better than no worship at all. We hardly need to say, however, that the intercourse with God should be a constant experience, resulting in feelings which cannot but express themselves as we walk through life, but the expression of which comes to its climax when, assembling with like-minded souls, we "worship the Lord in holy array."

Our Intercourse with God is like Our Intercourse with Man.—We communicate with men through physical expression. Men speak, they write, they make gestures, they paint pictures, they chisel statues, they conduct business,

they do work—all of which expresses themselves. We watch them in these things; we note also their conflicts, their likes and dislikes. We see them in cooperation with their fellowmen, and finally they seem to exercise an influence over us by their very presence, and sometimes we feel that they are with us when in body they are absent from us. Man is more than his body, but he expresses himself through his body.

God Expresses Himself Physically.—So God is more than the physical universe, but just as man expresses himself physically, so God reveals himself in the life that throbs in his physical universe. It is not a thing manufactured by him; it is an organism alive with his life. If I could take my stand wholly outside the universe and had vision adequate to survey the whole world as comprehensively as I take in your physical presence, what should I see? I should discern a single organism with every part including man related to every other part in orderly fashion, as in a physical organism. I should see it all in motion, alive, changing, doing things, giving expression to intelligence, truth, beauty and goodness. I should feel myself in the living presence of a self-conscious personality who was addressing me by word and gesture.

Now, only in imagination can a man stand off thus and watch the whole world. By the proper exercise of that faculty, however, he can reach some degree of consciousness of intercourse with God's physical organism. To help in this high experience he may turn to the face of nature as he does it. To make it personal, I go out upon a little hill overlooking my home and the city of New York. Under my feet is the earth; over my head are the heavenly bodies. This earth and those bodies have been there ages

immemorial, because they are parts of a living organism, the very body of God. God is holding them there. As I contemplate the earth and the heavens I find God expressing his power and his intelligence; and in the law and order of these physical things, the dependability of his own nature; that is, his moral character. I pick up a stone and I think of the wonders of its constituents. The little pebble is made of innumerable atoms, and I think of the whirling systems of protons and electrons bound there in the grip of the nature of that stone—an expression of God's life. I look out on the lawn and see the grass growing, and I marvel at the process by which the salts of the earth, wooed by the warmth and light of the sun, change themselves into this green beauty. A bird is singing in a nearby tree, a prototype of all living creatures and part of God's great body; his life is expressing itself in the flight and in the song. The sun is setting in the west; on the gauzy clouds the light is playing; the glories of a sunset entrance the soul. How like the blush of a maiden! God is living in my presence; there are beauty and glory in that life. The lights of the city are dancing before me; they were put there by men along streets constructed by men, lined with homes built by men. Ten miles distant rise the great skyscrapers wrought out in men's brains, constructed by men with machinery invented by men, using materials gathered by men and housing the activities of men, multiform beyond dreams. But men are part of the body of God; in them God is living. It is true that by his mysterious working he has ordered that these infinitesimal parts of his life shall be individuals with creative wills, in a measure independent of himself and yet a part of himself. As I see God living in men, I find intelligence; man is thinking; that is, God's

life is expressing itself in thought. I find feeling in all its rich ranges, from deep sorrow to sublime joy; in God's life, therefore, there is feeling. I find will, with the power to choose and to execute; and I conclude that God makes choices and executes them. That is, as I see these portions of God's body expressing his life, I find him to be a being who thinks and feels and wills and loves; that is, a person.

The story is told of Whittier that when he was a little boy seven years of age, his mother took him with her on a visit to an outcast girl who had fallen sick and whom no one else would attend because of her wickedness. Whittier's mother, however, went and ministered to her physical needs, and as she did the necessary work about the desolate room he saw his mother pause and brush back the hair from the girl's forehead and speak to her tenderly, calling her "my dear." His young heart marveled at the goodness of his mother. Going out under the stars he looked up to the heavens and said to himself, "I wonder if God is as good as my mother is." Well, where did that goodness come from, if Whittier's mother was not a part of the living body of the loving God? Something like this, only more sublime, is what we see in the life and death of Jesus Christ. Where did that goodness come from, if he was not a part of the living body of God? In the body and spirit of Jesus we see God expressing himself.

But What About the Evil in the World?—As I look out over the habitations of men, however, I am aware of much misery. Is this also a part of God? Now I could wish to be able to solve the problem of evil. I shall not attempt it, however, but only say that in the world as a whole we have nothing different in this respect than we have in ourselves. Every human body, however beautiful, however

useful, however glorious its tenant, lives in the midst of death. A large proportion of the very cells of the body are constantly dying; with that death is associated the unlovely. The great thing, however, is the victory of the life over the death. So, however hard it may be for us to contemplate the evil of the world, it is with the universe as it is with our bodies: in the very process of change, involving death, life is made possible. That life is God in action before our eyes.

Is Conversation with God Possible?—But in our dealings with our fellowmen they speak to us intimately. Does God hold physical conversation with us? If he does, it must be in a language which we know, and by use of lips to whose tones we have ears to respond. Now, we have no organs of understanding of a sublime language; we have ears that are fitted to interpret the sound produced by human voices, but none for the voice of the universe. If, therefore, God is to speak to us in language which we can understand, it must be by some instrument to which we can give ear. Apparently the only way for God to converse with us intimately is through some human being like ourselves, who speaks a language which we understand but who at the same time is a vital part of God's own person. We do have such conversation with God. Beyond any question the things which our best friends say to us when we seek the mind of God are, indeed, the word of God. The fact that it may be a little difficult to dissociate these words from words which could not be called his does not make it any less true. We do hold conversation with God through talks with his children. We need only to arouse ourselves to this significant fact.

Conversing with God in the Heart.—More intimate,

more meaningful than our intercourse with God through his physical expressions, is that contact which we have with him in our own hearts. If we are a part of him, his heart is beating in us; if our thought is made possible because he thinks, then we may think together. When, therefore, I give myself to meditation, seeking to understand the best impulses within myself, I am in converse with God. When in such a mood I review the things I have been doing and my "conscience" points out that certain things were ignoble, it is the voice of God. When in like mood I inquire as to what my course shall be and there rises up within me a determination to do the noble thing, it is the counsel of God. When in converse with myself I face the dilemmas of life and out of the struggle find a clear decision, I have had intercourse with God.

Finding God Through Thought.—Suppose we lack, or think we lack, the mystical qualities which go with these things but, perhaps, pride ourselves upon our intelligence. Very well, by the exercise of our intelligence we may think ourselves into contact with God, through the study of his universe. Or we may apply our intellect to history, to the creeds of the church, to the Bible, to the experiences of men, to the study of the nature of man and to converse with other men. In so doing we shall have intercourse with God. He may become real to us through thought.

The Resulting Feelings.—Now, as surely as we have contacts with God through these or any other processes, we are bound to have feelings. First of all, perhaps, will be the feeling of *admiration;* here is greatness beyond conception. Then we pass judgment on the *values* inherent in what we see in God, and here we find everything that is worth while, from power and might to goodness and love.

We naturally consent to his highest *claims;* we concede instantly that he has a right to be heard, to be obeyed, to receive from us everything he desires. Then our sense of *beauty* is stimulated. Here is perfect beauty—physical beauty, intellectual beauty, spiritual beauty. Then we find *pleasure* in contemplating him. It is a delight to find the perfect one. Associated with these simple emotions are the great feelings of *reverence*, of *awe*, of *expansion* of spirit. Accompanying these emotions is the sense of *gratitude* for divine goodness, together with *shame* and *repentance* for evil-doing; in short, the whole gamut of feeling is swept from the intellectual to the moral, as we come into contact with God. Then, indeed, are we ready to worship.

Expressing Feeling in Worship.—For him who has had vital intercourse with God, there is no empty formality in worship. He may use forms, but they will tingle with reality if he does. He may be wholly ignorant of forms, but he will worship in spirit and in truth whatever the means of expression.

Having had contacts with the soul of the universe a man goes to the house of worship. How shall he express his feelings? "Let all the earth keep silence before him" may be his first reaction. There are certain groups of Christians for whom the best expression of worship appears to be silence, especially when the whole congregation keeps silence together. In many congregations, therefore, periods of silence are provided for.

But silence is not enough. Worship calls also for active expression. This is given in many ways. The very attitude of the body is called into play—kneeling, bowing of the head, or standing in reverence. With this goes the word of mouth in prayer, song, confession or creedal

affirmation, culminating in the observance of the sacraments, the highest symbolic form of worship in the church.

Vitalizing the Service of Worship.—Services of worship however elaborate may be perfectly hollow and empty; but if we bring to them feelings consequent upon intercourse with God, the simplest forms become effective. We rise in our places at the call to worship; it is an expression of admiration of God. We sing the hymns and the responses; our feeling is going out in joy and gratitude to him. We read responsively, it may be, from the ancient psalms; in so doing we are joining with this congregation and with multitudes of congregations around the world, and with worshipers through the ages who have used these same vehicles of expression.

Prayer, whether led by a single voice or spoken in unison, is the putting into words of some of the feelings of the heart in communion with God. If there is no experience of him the prayer will be dead; with it, the prayer will throb with life.

So throughout the services of a Christian church the heart that is warm from contact with the heavenly Father will find itself pouring out feelings that are worthy of the human heart and joyfully welcomed by the divine heart.

The Effect of Worship on Life.—The sordid and the ignoble seem simply impossible in such an atmosphere. Our *work* is exacting, but our contacts with God make us strong. We meet all kinds of *men,* but our sense of God as Father makes them all brothers to us. We want to deal nobly with them; we are eager to render service, even to sacrifice. High *duties* call us to great endeavor; the inspiration is available. On the other hand *unjust treatment* vexes us, but patience is ample. We are tempted to try

the satisfactions of low living, but they do not appeal to us strongly. *Burdens* come and *sorrows* overtake us; we view them in the light of the infinite and the eternal. Finally we face *death,* but a calm strong peace possesses us; in fine, we are fitted to live when we worship in spirit and in truth.

> My soul leans toward him; stretches out its arms,
> And waits expectant. Speak to me, my God:
> And let me know the living Father cares
> For me, even me; for this one of his children.
> Hast thou no word for me? I am thy thought.
> GOD, let thy mighty heart beat into mine,
> And let mine answer as a pulse of thine.
>
> —GEORGE MACDONALD

STUDY QUESTIONS AND REFERENCES

I. Enrolling in the School of Jesus

1. What is meant by *finding* a religion?
2. What determines whether one is a Christian?
3. How must our following of Jesus differ from that of the disciples?
4. Name some of the plain teachings of Jesus.
5. What is the value of Christian doctrines? Name some.
6. What is the use of creeds? Their misuse?
7. What do ceremonies contribute to Christian living?
8. What is the relation of character to Christian life?

Matt. 4:18-22; 7:21; 10:32, 33, 40; 11:28-30; 16:16; Luke 9:57-62; John 1:12; 4:25, 26; 13:15; 15:14

II. Getting Acquainted With God

1. How does Jesus introduce men to God?
2. Does God have a body anything like ours?
3. Do we claim or disclaim responsibility in every day life?
4. What name for God does Jesus use most?
5. Is it reasonable to take God for granted?
6. Describe the mechanistic and the spiritualistic theories.
7. May we believe in a God whose existence we cannot demonstrate?
8. How would you live with an insane person or a mindless world?

Matt. 5:8; 6:26; 11:27; 23:9; John 7:17; 10:30, 34-36; 14:9

III. Sensing Spiritual Realities

1. Are the things we call spiritual real?
2. Was the physical in Jesus more real than the spiritual?
3. Is Jesus living now? If so, how and where?
4. Is there a spiritual equivalent for physical breathing?
5. What is the Holy Spirit? What names does Jesus use?
6. Do we have any experiences of the Holy Spirit? What are they?
7. Does the average man have mystical experiences?
8. What is the sensible practice in spiritual living?

Luke 4:1; Matt. 10:20; 12:31; John 3:1-12; 14:16, 17, 26; 15:4, 26; 16:8-11

IV. Accepting Moral Responsibility

1. What are the problems of moral responsibility?
2. What relation has chemical reaction to character?
3. Do we claim or disclaim responsibility in every day life?
4. What is moral action?
5. State Jesus' position on human responsibility.
6. What are Christ's standards, personal and social?
7. What consequences are involved in responsibility?
8. State the practical attitude toward immortality.

Luke 13:23, 24; Matt. 5:3-12, 20, 29, 30, 30-48; 6:10-21, 33; 20:27, 28; 25:14-30; Luke 10:25-37; John 3:18-21

V. Standing By One Another

1. Why is the church necessary?
2. What constitutes *the* church, *a* church?
3. How does association with others strengthen one?
4. How can the power of crowd psychology be safely used?
5. Should we seek to suppress "the mind of the crowd"?
6. Can reason control mass feeling? How?
7. Is a perfect church desirable?
8. What does the church contribute to Christian living?

John 13:34, 35; Matt. 4:19; 16:18, 19; 18:19, 20; 22:9; Luke 4:16; Mark 16.15

VI. Using the Bible

1. What is our concern with the Bible?
2. How can scholarly studies be superficial?
3. Illustrate the use of the Bible with or without studies.
4. Illustrate the superstitious use of the Bible.
5. What is the danger from false claims regarding the Bible?
6. What is the real nature of the Bible?
7. In what spirit are we to interpret the Bible?
8. Wherein is the Bible unique?

John 5:39; Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; 5:17-20, 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44; 23:23; Luke 16:31

VII. Facing Spiritual Failure

1. What is sin? Name three aspects of sin.
2. How does aggressive sin work?
3. Is a man responsible for his sins?
4. What is the effect of sin on character?
5. What is repentance? Is it *always* remorseful?
6. Can evil ever be transformed into good?
7. What are the functions of the Saviour?
8. What is it to "believe in Christ"?

Matt. 7:18; 9:13; 15:19; Luke 6:45; 11:39; 15:7, 10-24; 18:10-14; 7:37-47

VIII. Discovering God's Heart on Calvary

1. What was the teaching of Jesus about the atonement?
2. What effect has the Cross upon God?
3. What effect has the Cross upon man?
4. What are the principles of all friendship?
5. How does the Cross introduce God to man?
6. How does the Cross interest man in God?
7. How does the Cross reveal God's interest in us?
8. How does the Cross make sinners friendly to God?

Matt. 16:21; 20:28; 26:28; Luke 12:50; 24:46, 47; John 3:14-17; 6:51; 8:28; 10:11, 15; 12:32, 33, 45

IX. Finding New Confidence in Prayer

1. Is it childish or childlike to pray?
2. What is a good key to the problems of prayer?
3. What part has asking for things in friendship and in prayer?
4. Can man speak God's language?
5. Does God ever do things because we ask him to?
6. Has prayer a place in the realm of psychic phenomena?
7. Is God subject to the laws of ethics?
8. Must God ever wait for man's prayer?

Matt. 6:5-15; 7:7; 18: 19; 26:36-41; Luke 6:12; 18:1-8; John 15:7

X. Transforming Life Through Worship

1. What do we mean by worship?
2. What is the fountain head of worship?
3. Does God express himself by physical means?
4. How is evil related to God's life?
5. Is physical conversation with God possible?
6. What feelings result from intercourse with God?
7. How may one express his feelings about God?
8. What effect has worship on life?

John 4:19-24; Matt. 15:8, 9; 21:16; Luke 4:16; Mark 11:15-17; 12:40

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